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## MUSSOLINI
# RISE OF FASCISM
Uncover the First World War origins that turned a lowly officer into Italy's Axis dictator

FUTURE

ISSUE 102

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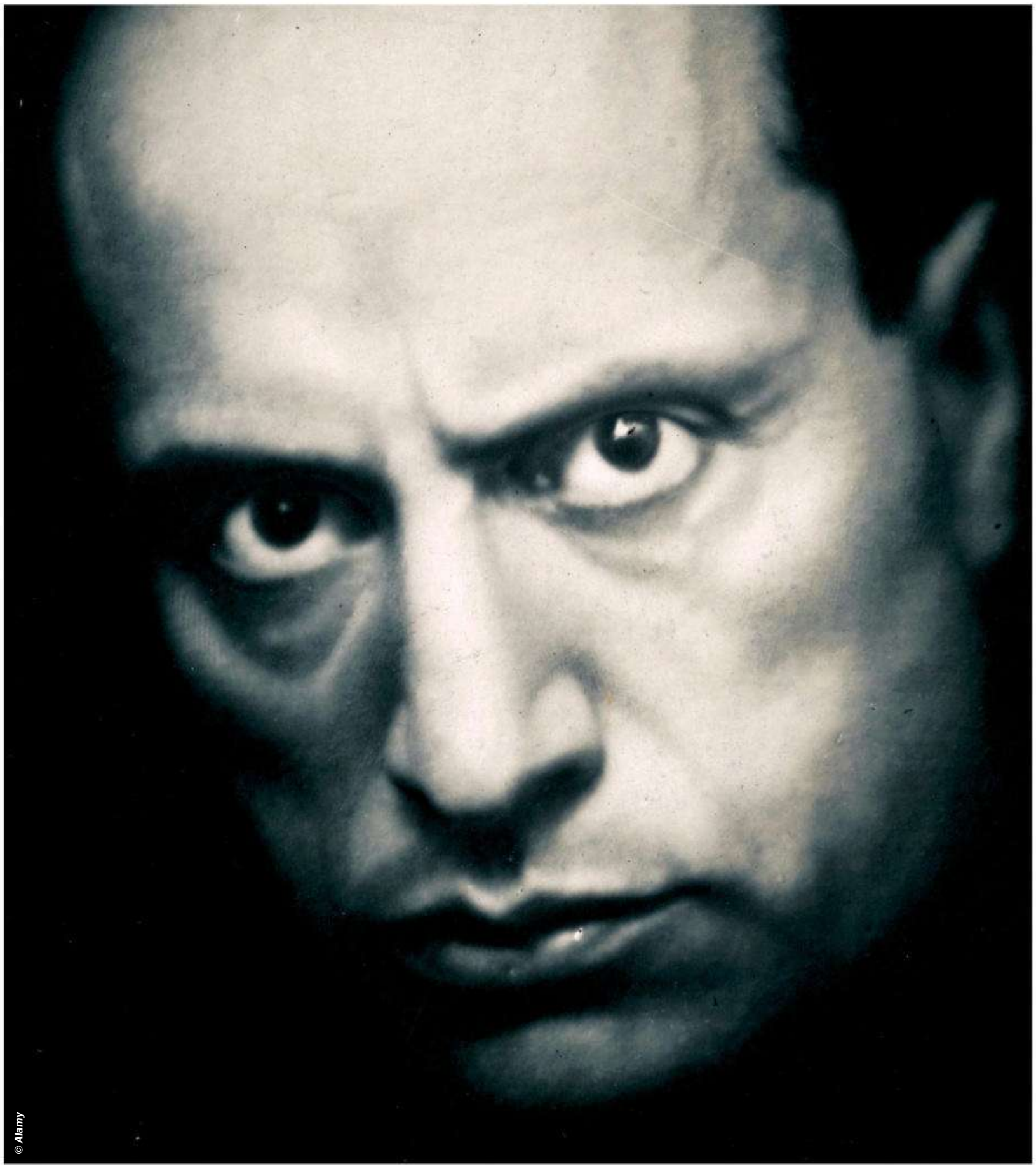

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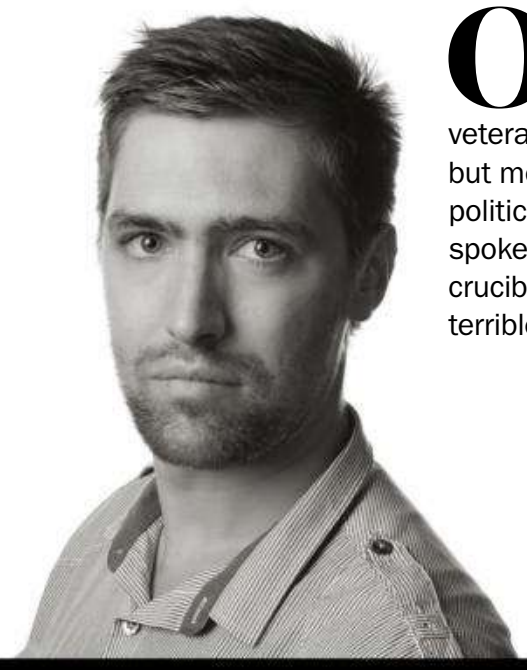
***Above:*** Mussolini's experiences in World War I played a huge role in his rise to becoming Italy's dictator

# Welcome



Of the many often-noted similarities between the rise of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, perhaps the most intriguing is their experiences of the First World War. As veterans, the conflict had a big impact on both men personally, but more significant was how its aftermath set the stage for their political ideologies to grow. This issue, Professor Richard Bosworth spoke with Tom Garner about how the First World War served as the crucible of Mussolini's fascist dictatorship, and how it set Italy on a terrible, self-destructive path towards an alliance with Nazi Germany.

**Tim Williamson**
Editor-in-Chief

## CONTRIBUTORS

### PROF. RICHARD BOSWORTH

Professor Bosworth is Emeritus Fellow, Jesus College Oxford, and has written several books on Mussolini and Italian history. Over on page 24 he spoke with Features Editor Tom Garner about the rise of Mussolini during and after World War I.

### MURRAY DAHM

For this issue's Frontline Murray takes a look at the many wars of Julius Caesar, from his early conquests of the Gauls to his great rivalry with Pompey that sparked a bloody civil war and saw the emergence of the Roman Empire.

### ALEX BOWERS

For this issue's Heroes of the Victoria Cross, on page 46, Alex takes a look at one of the heroes of the Charge of the Light Brigade: Alexander Dunn. Read how this young Hussar officer saved his fellow cavalryman in the thick of the disastrous British charge.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# RISE OF FASCISM


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WAR in FOCUS

# SEND IN THE BOMB SQUAD

***c.September 1940***

Lieutenant R Davies, commander of a bomb disposal unit, looks for the fuse of a 1,200lb bomb as it is hoisted from a crater in London. Born in Cornwall, England, Davies emigrated to Canada but returned to England and joined the Royal Engineers' bomb disposal unit in London. During the Blitz he was awarded the George Cross for his conduct in defusing an unexploded bomb in the grounds of St Paul's Cathedral, close to the west entrance. The two-ton ordnance was large enough to cause significant damage to St Paul's but Davies and his team were able to remove it, later safely detonating it in Hackney Marshes, East London.

© Getty

© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

## "TO THE FRONT"

***December 1914***

Two soldiers prepare to board a train at Victoria Station, London, on their way to the frontline. They are carrying parcels of food and other provisions. Victoria Station was one of the main transit hubs for troops travelling to and returning from active service during the First World War. Britain's railways were a crucial part of the war effort and in the first month of the conflict helped transport 120,000 troops for embarkation in Southampton. In 1920 the Unknown Warrior was repatriated through Victoria Station on 10 November, before being interred at Westminster Abbey the next day.

WAR in FOCUS

# THE LAST VULCAN

***2015***

Avro Vulcan XH558 ‘Spirit of Great Britain’, with RAF livery, is photographed during its ‘farewell tour’ over the distinctive white cliffs of the coastline near Dover in Kent. The last airworthy Vulcan, XH558 ended its flying career in 2015. It is now preserved by the Vulcan to the Sky Trust, a registered charity in the UK.

© Alamy

TIMELINE OF...

# CAESAR'S WARS

Julius Caesar conducts dazzlingly successful but devastating military campaigns across the Ancient World in order to increase his power, and that of the Roman Republic

*A marble relief by 18th Century sculptor John Deare depicts Caesar invading Britain*

81 BCE

## SIEGE OF MYTILENE 01

A young soldier in the Roman Army, Caesar serves with distinction under the command of Marcus Minucius Thermus at the Siege of Mytilene. He is awarded the Civic Crown, a military decoration given to Romans who save the lives of fellow citizens.

*The remains of a Roman aqueduct near Mytilene*

58-50 BCE

## GALLIC WARS

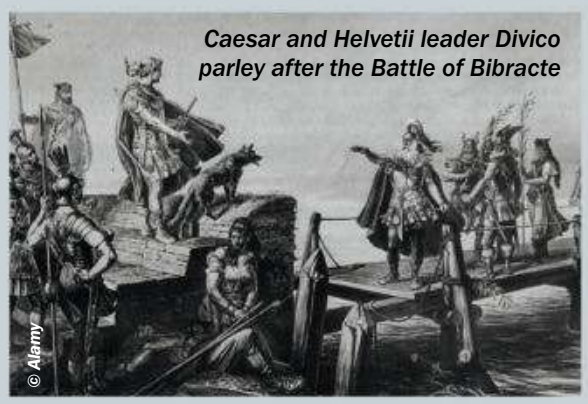
Elected consul, Caesar launches wars against the Celtic peoples of Gaul in an aggressive war of Roman expansion. Possibly one million Celtic people are killed in conflicts that are probably fought to boost Caesar's political career and pay off his debts.

*A 17th Century tapestry depicting Caesar during the Gallic Wars*

58 BCE

## BATTLE OF BIBRACTE 02

The second major battle of the Gallic Wars sees six Roman legions commanded by Caesar defeat a numerically superior confederation force of Helvetii tribesmen. Bibracte is a long, bloody battle with Caesar writing that the Helvetii suffer heavy (if disputed) casualties.



*Caesar and Helvetii leader Divico parley after the Battle of Bibracte*

"POSSIBLY ONE MILLION CELTIC PEOPLE ARE KILLED IN CONFLICTS THAT ARE PROBABLY FOUGHT TO BOOST CAESAR'S POLITICAL CAREER AND PAY OFF HIS DEBTS"

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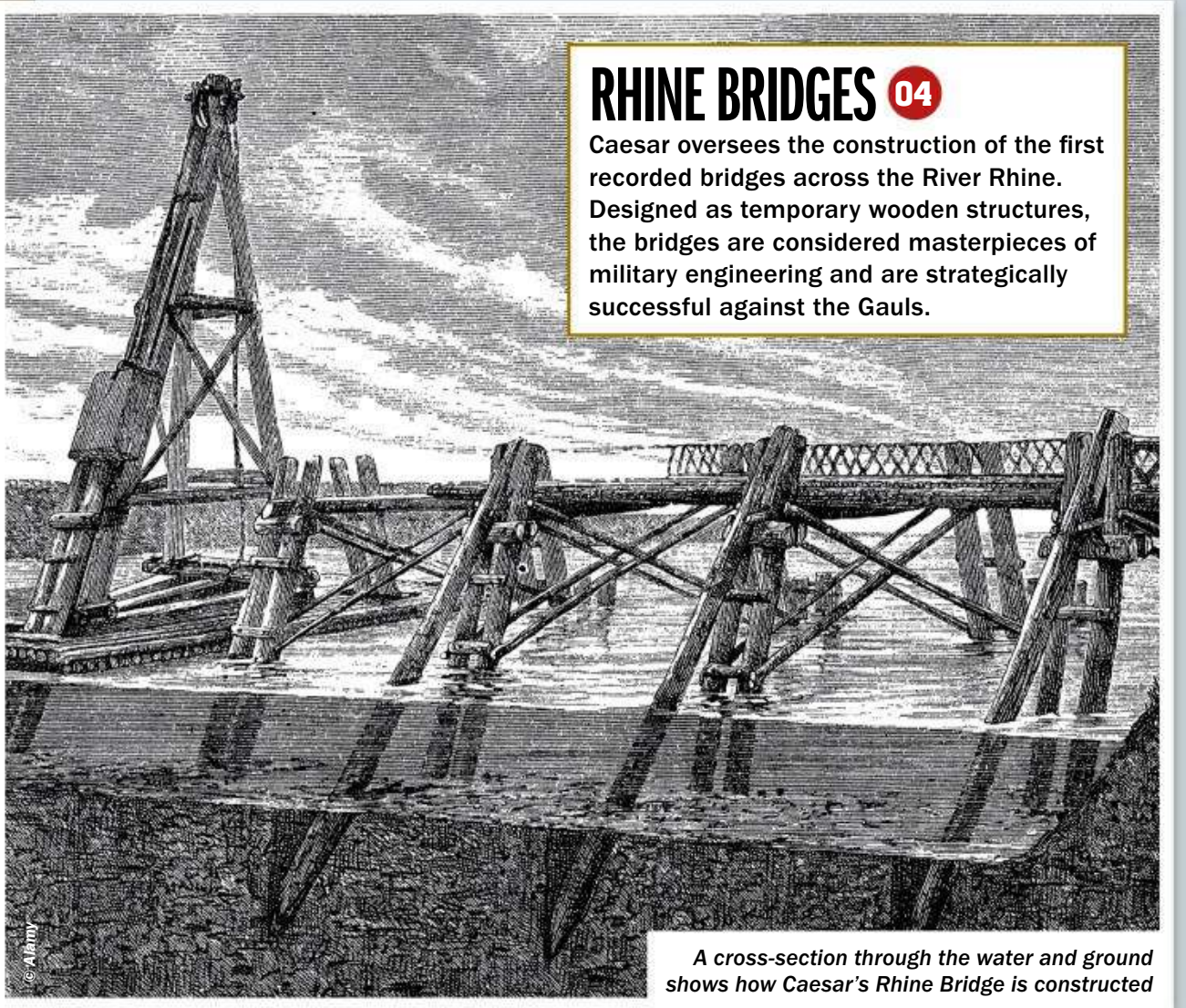
## INVASIONS OF BRITAIN 03

Caesar launches two invasions of Britain. Landing both times on the southern coast of England, his forces manage to cross the River Thames with the campaigns significantly increasing Roman knowledge of Britain.

## RHINE BRIDGES 04

Caesar oversees the construction of the first recorded bridges across the River Rhine. Designed as temporary wooden structures, the bridges are considered masterpieces of military engineering and are strategically successful against the Gauls.



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*A cross-section through the water and ground shows how Caesar's Rhine Bridge is constructed*

Image: Wikimedia / PD / US

## SIEGE OF UXELLODUNUM 07

One of the last battles of the Gallic Wars takes place above the River Dordogne in modern France. Caesar defeats besieged Gallic rebels and then brutally mutilates prisoners after accepting their surrender.

*A medieval depiction of the Siege of Uxellodunum*

55-54 BCE | 55-53 BCE | 54-53 BCE | September 52 BCE | 51 BCE

## AMBIORIX'S REVOLT 05

Ambiorix, the leader of the Eburones tribe in northeast Gaul rebels and destroys 15 Roman cohorts at Atuatuca Tungrorum. Caesar leads a punitive expedition and effectively exterminates the Eburones.

***Left:** A statue of Ambiorix in the Market Square of Tongeren, Belgium*

© Alamy

***Right:** An 1899 painting titled 'Vercingetorix Throws Down his Arms at the Feet of Julius Caesar' by French painter Lionel-Noël Royer*

## BATTLE OF ALESIA 06

Caesar completes his conquest of Gaul by defeating a confederation of Gallic tribes led by Vercingetorix. The Romans successfully besiege the Gauls at Alesia in what is considered one of Caesar's greatest military achievements.

© Alamy

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INVASIONS OF BRITAIN 03

RHINE BRIDGES 04

AMBIORIX'S REVOLT 05

SIEGE OF UXELLODUNUM 07

BATTLE OF ALESIA 06

BATTLE OF BIBRACTE 02

CROSSING THE RUBICON 08

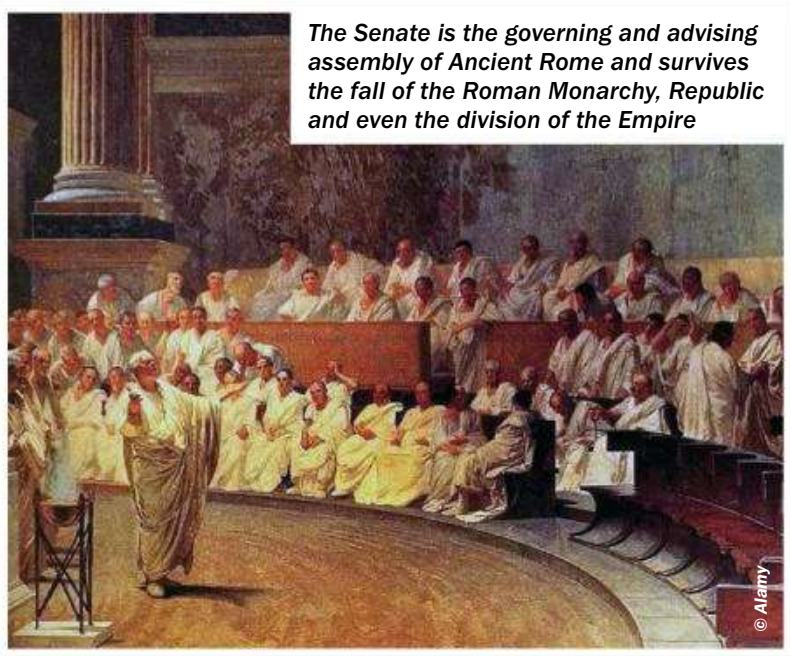
BATTLE OF MUNDA 10

SIEGE OF MYTILENE 01

"SIDING WITH PHARAOH CLEOPATRA VII, HE HELPS HER TO WIN THE CIVIL WAR AND INSTALLS HER AS RULER"

## CAESAR'S CIVIL WAR

Caesar and his supporters fight the Roman Senate for control of the Roman Republic. Fought across the Mediterranean basin, Caesar wins the war and becomes Dictator perpetuo ("Dictator for Life"). This political realignment eventually results in the Roman Empire.



*The Senate is the governing and advising assembly of Ancient Rome and survives the fall of the Roman Monarchy, Republic and even the division of the Empire*

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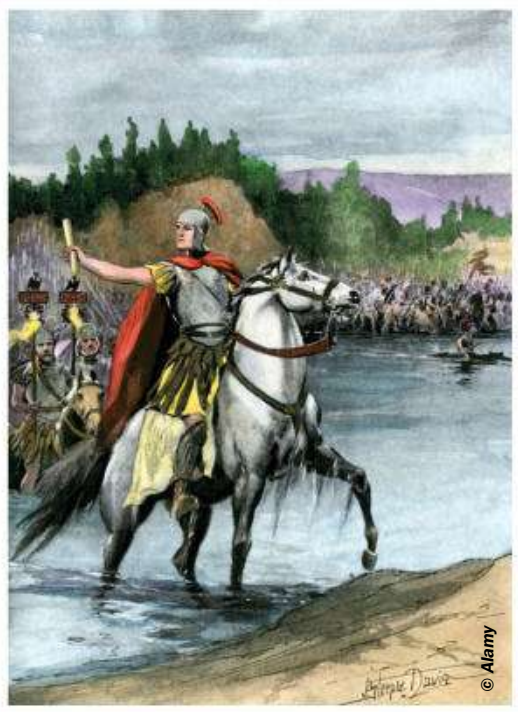

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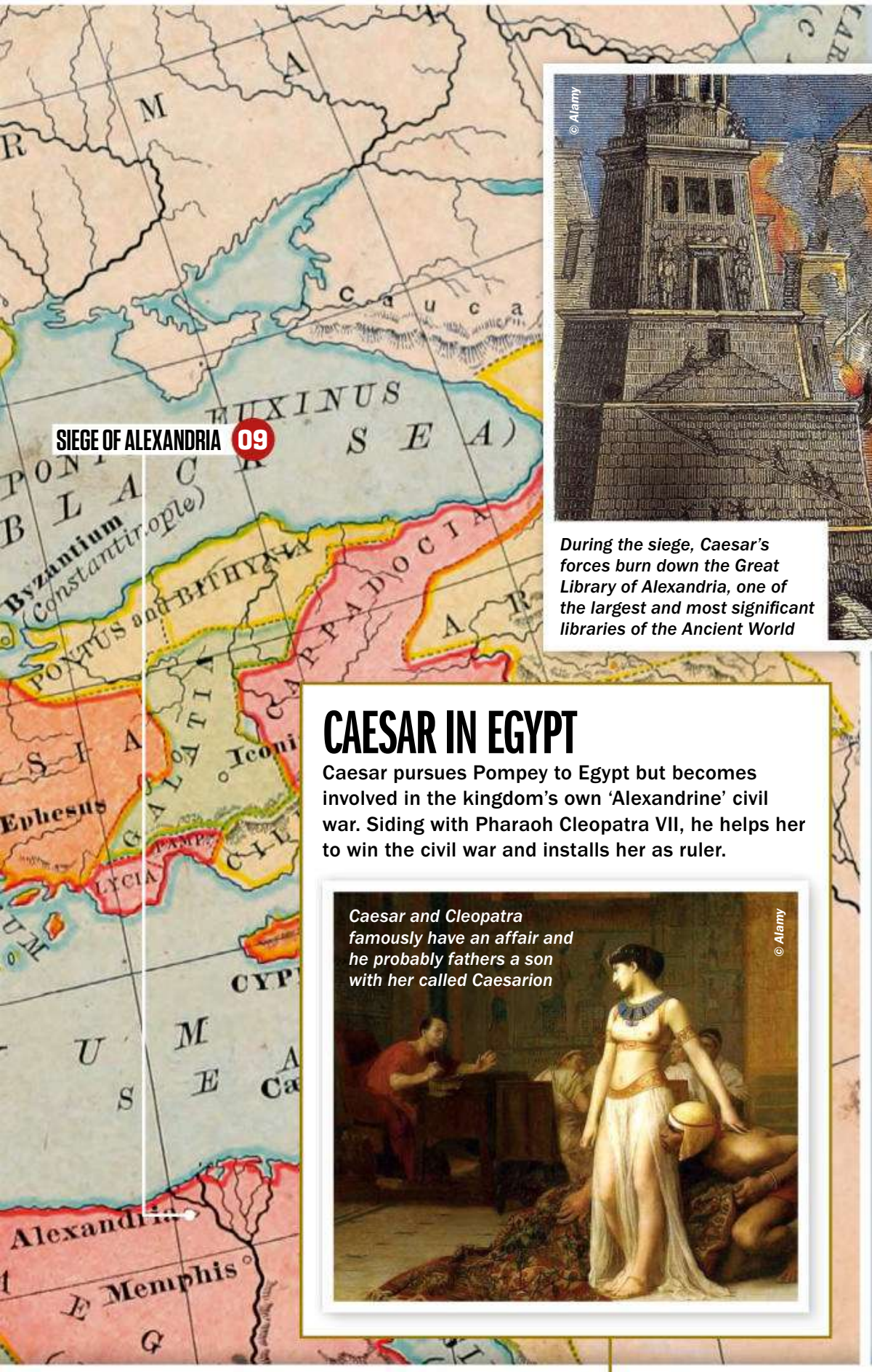
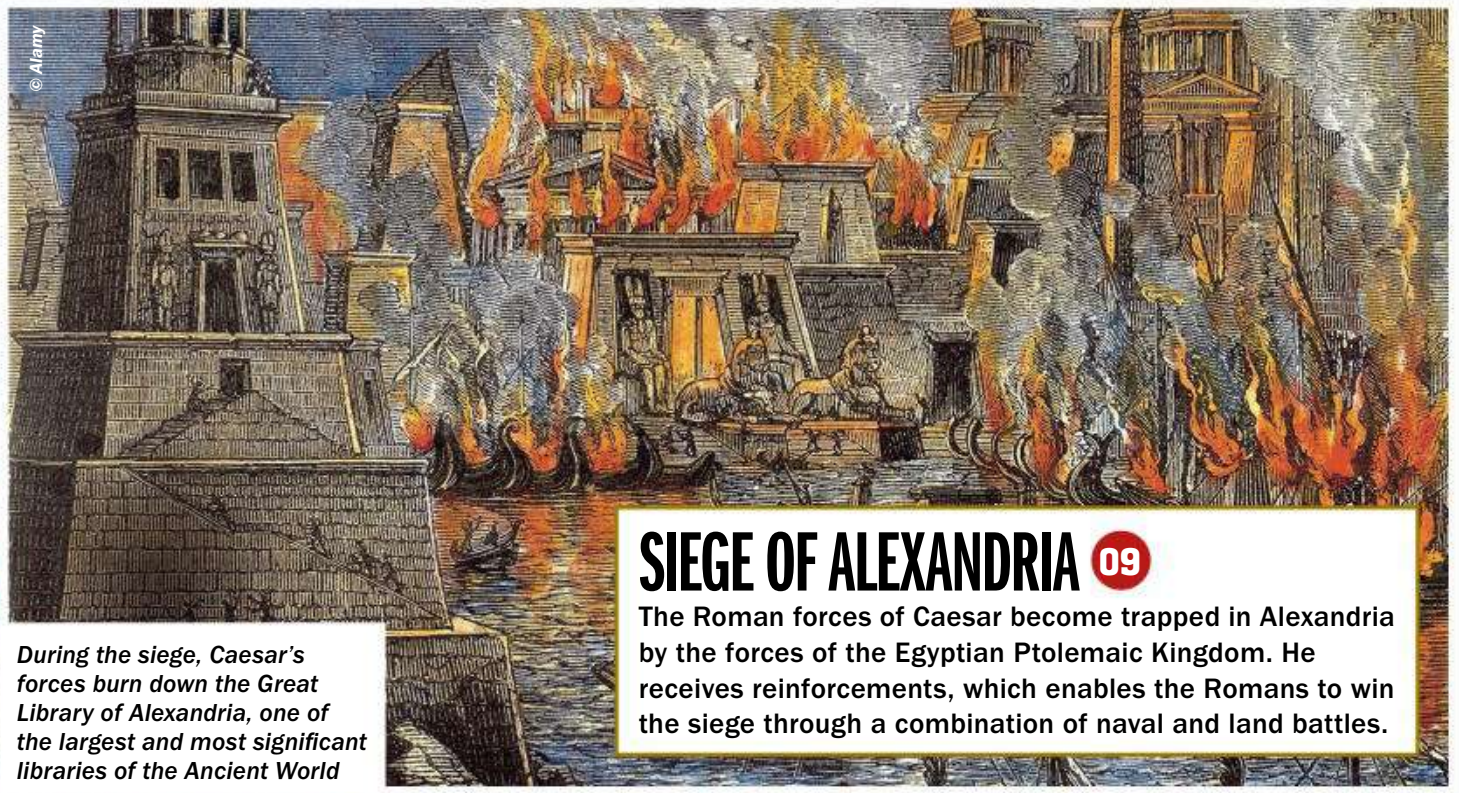
## CROSSING THE RUBICON 08

Caesar moves the 13th Legion across the Rubicon River, which is then the northern boundary of Italy. This is a direct violation of a Senate order and Caesar's action begins the Civil War.

*"Crossing the Rubicon" has become a metaphor that means, "To pass a point of no return"*




SIEGE OF ALEXANDRIA 09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*During the siege, Caesar's forces burn down the Great Library of Alexandria, one of the largest and most significant libraries of the Ancient World*

## SIEGE OF ALEXANDRIA 09

**The Roman forces of Caesar become trapped in Alexandria by the forces of the Egyptian Ptolemaic Kingdom. He receives reinforcements, which enables the Romans to win the siege through a combination of naval and land battles.**

## CAESAR IN EGYPT

**Caesar pursues Pompey to Egypt but becomes involved in the kingdom's own 'Alexandrine' civil war. Siding with Pharaoh Cleopatra VII, he helps her to win the civil war and installs her as ruler.**


*Caesar and Cleopatra famously have an affair and he probably fathers a son with her called Caesarion*

© Alamy

## BATTLE OF MUNDA 10

**The final battle of the Civil War sees Caesar defeat an opposing army led by Pompey's son. The 'Pomepeians' suffer losses of 30,000 soldiers while Caesar returns to Rome in triumph to govern as dictator. He is assassinated the following year.**

*Retired Roman veterans of Munda reputedly found the city of Acinipo in the aftermath of the battle*

© Alamy

48-47 BCE

47 BCE

17 March 45 BCE

9 August 48 BCE

## BATTLE OF PHARSALUS

**The decisive battle of the Civil War, Pharsalus sees Caesar defeat Pompey in central Greece despite being outnumbered. Most of Pompey's men surrender after the engagement and he is forced to flee while Caesar's political legitimacy is enhanced.**

*Pompey escapes from Pharsalus but is later assassinated in Egypt by courtiers of Pharaoh Ptolemy XVIII*

© Alamy

## WAR COMMENTARIES

**The details of Caesar's military campaigns are known through two unique memoirs that he wrote: Commentarii de Bello Gallico ("The Gallic Wars") and the Commentarii de Bello Civili ("The Civil War").**

*A medieval German edition of The Gallic Wars dating from 1469*

Image: Wiki / PD / US

*Roman soldiers clash with British warriors during Caesar's first invasion of 55 BCE*

# INVASION OF BRITAIN

## Julius Caesar led two military expeditions to Britain during 55-54 BCE, but he faced stiff resistance and neither adventure was a great success

In the Classical World, the island of Britain was a place of mystery. Its coastline had been explored by the Greek geographer Pytheas in the 4th century BCE, but to the Romans it was the edge of the known world. Inhabited by various Celtic tribes, Britain had an Iron Age culture and was known as a source of tin. There was substantial trade between the Celts of Britain and their Continental counterparts, with the Belgae confederation of tribes living on both sides of the English Channel.

### "Leap down, soldiers"

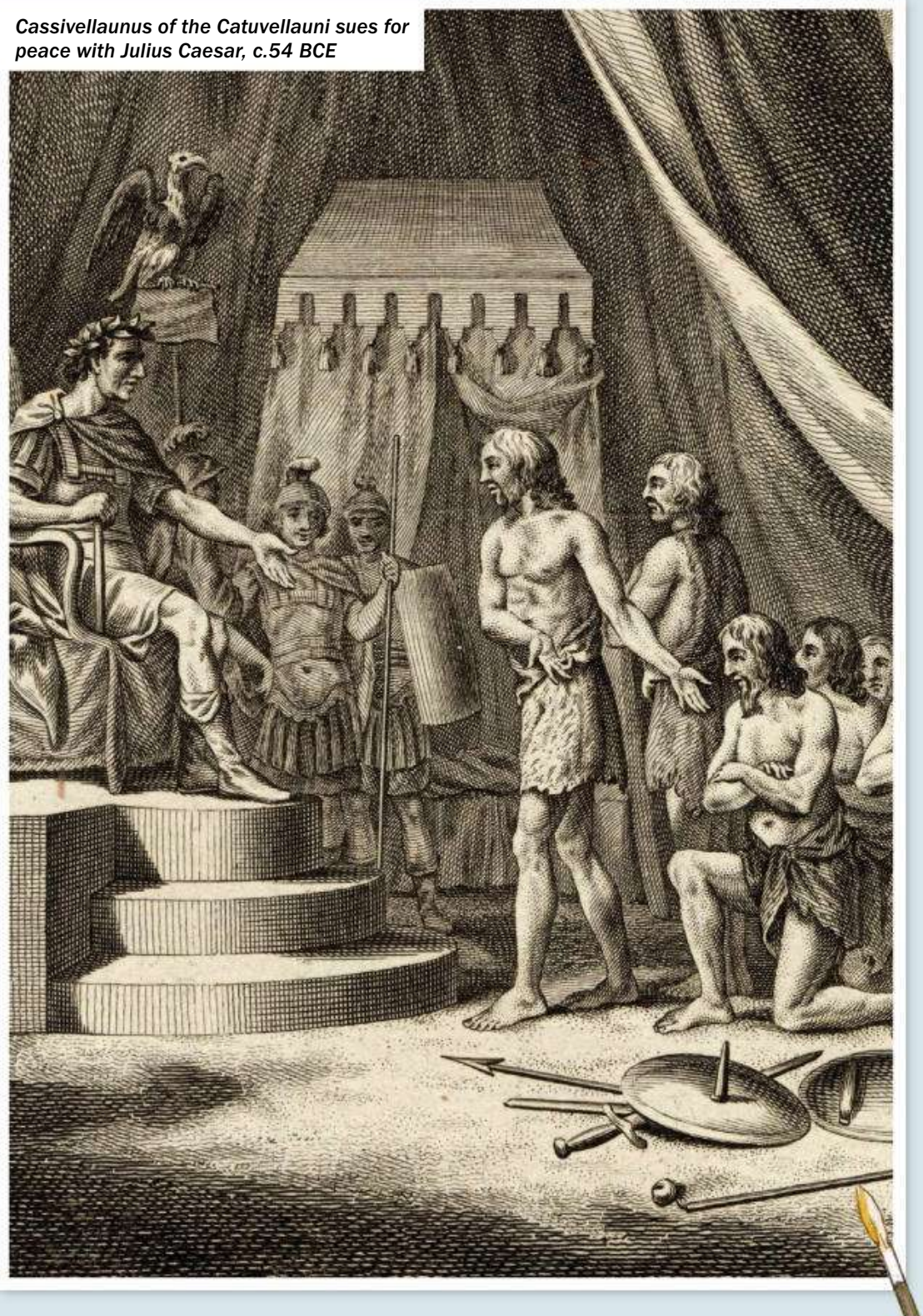
For Julius Caesar, Britain's close relationship with Gaul was problematic. He wrote that British tribes had been providing assistance to the Gauls in their fight against his forces during the Gallic Wars. Whether this is true or not is uncertain but Caesar used it as a pretext to launch a military expedition to the island in 55 BCE. He was a highly ambitious man and invading Britain, although risky, would raise his prestige back in Rome. With enough ships to carry two Roman legions and cavalry, Caesar probably sailed from what is now Boulogne on 23 August 55 BCE.

Caesar initially tried to land at Dover but wrote that his fleet "beheld the armed forces of the enemy displayed on all the cliffs". He sailed for seven miles until he landed at either Walmer or Pegwell Bay on the coast of Cantium (Kent). The Britons had tracked the Roman vessels, which forced the soldiers to land in deep water. Caesar wrote that their apprehension to disembark was dissolved by an anonymous standard-bearer of the 10th Legion. He jumped first and shouted: "Leap down, soldiers, unless you wish to betray your eagle to the enemy; it shall be told that I at any rate did my duty to my country and my general."

The Romans successfully landed after fierce fighting and established a camp, where Caesar received British ambassadors. However, many of his ships were damaged during high tides and a storm which prompted the Britons to attack the Romans once more. They attacked Caesar's

**"CAESAR HAD FORCED THE LEADING TRIBES OF SOUTHERN BRITAIN TO RESPECT ROME"**

*Cassivellaunus of the Catuvellauni sues for peace with Julius Caesar, c.54 BCE*



forces with chariots, although the Romans managed to fight them off. Caesar decided to not risk wintering in Britain and returned with his army to Gaul.

## Second invasion

The first Roman attempt at invading Britain had not been successful, although Caesar tried to frame his adventure as being more of a reconnaissance expedition. He immediately planned a second invasion for the following year, which was much more ambitious. Five legions and 2,000 cavalry would cross the Channel in ships specially designed for beach landings. They sailed from a port called Portus Itius, located in what is now the Pas-de-Calais, with Caesar claiming that he had 800 ships – although this number likely included trading as well as naval vessels.

Landing once more in Kent in the summer of 54 BCE, Caesar immediately marched his forces inland, crossed the River Stour and won a battle against the Britons at (possibly) Bigbury Camp west of Canterbury. Like the previous year, his docked ships were badly damaged in a storm and he had to return to the coast to conduct repairs. However, on this occasion he stayed in Kent and resumed his campaign.

The Britons had formed a confederation led by Cassivellaunus of the Catuvellauni tribe. These forces killed a Roman tribune, Quintus Laberius Durus, during a skirmish and adopted guerrilla warfare. Caesar marched north beyond the River Thames and used a scorched-earth policy on Cassivellaunus' lands, but the Britons often evacuated people and livestock beforehand.

Five British tribes did surrender to Caesar and revealed the location of Cassivellaunus' stronghold, which was possibly at Wheathampstead in Hertfordshire. The Romans besieged this fortress, which resulted in Cassivellaunus requesting an armistice after a failed diversionary attack. Through a Roman mediator called Commius, Caesar demanded that Cassivellaunus and other British tribal leaders give hostages and an annual tribute to Rome. Caesar and his army returned to Gaul to quell unrest there, so there were no Roman soldiers in Britain to enforce his demands.

The results of the 54 BCE invasion are difficult to assess. Caesar had forced the leading tribes of southern Britain to respect Rome but his expedition had not resulted in conquest and he had not fully defeated Cassivellaunus in the field. He never returned to the island and Britain remained free from Roman rule until Emperor Claudius' invasion of 43 CE.

# "A TERRIBLE APPEARANCE"

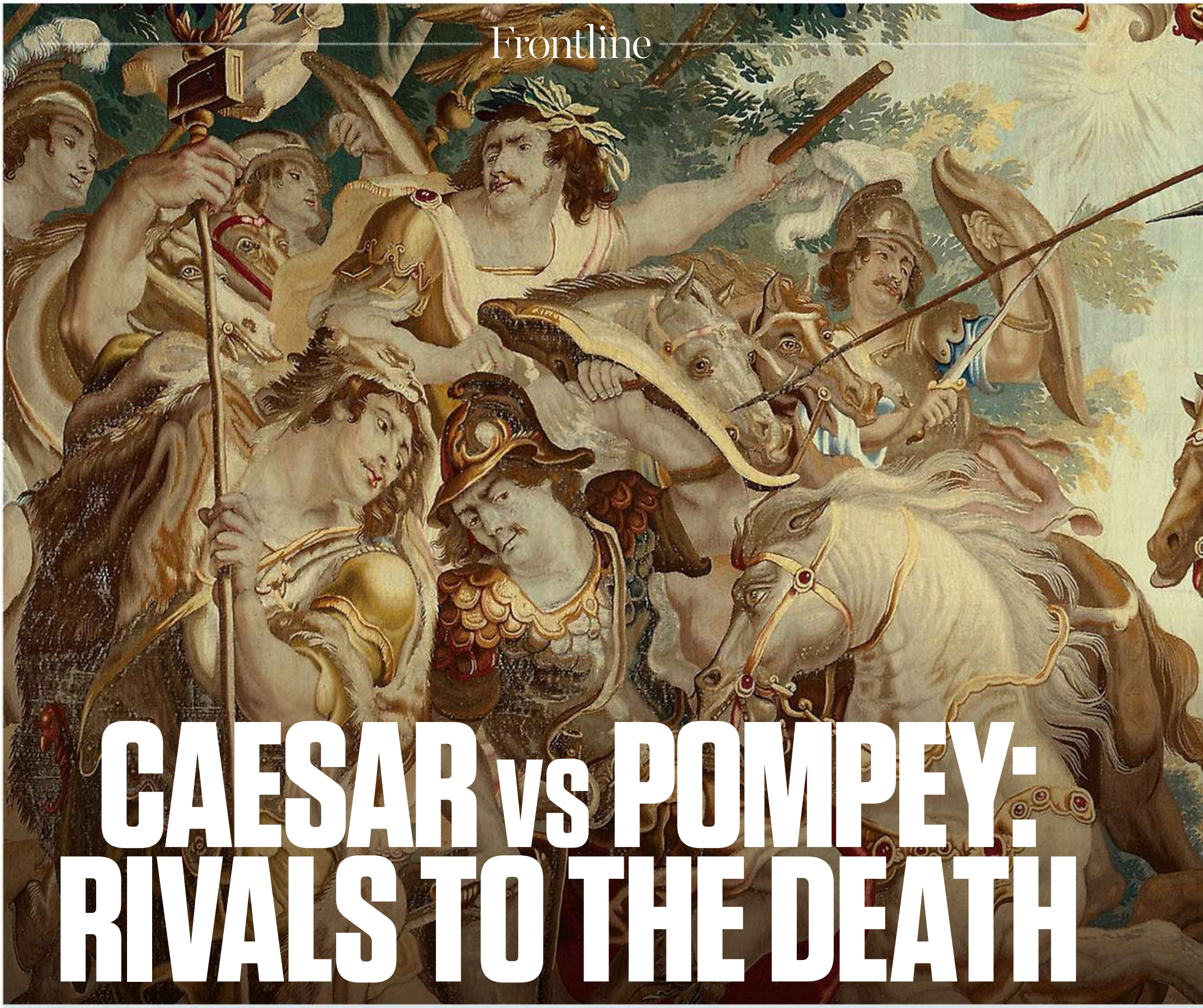
## JULIUS CAESAR WROTE MANY OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE GEOGRAPHY AND PEOPLES OF ANCIENT BRITAIN

**In his famous work *The Gallic War*, Caesar made the first detailed description of Britain. His own experience of Britain was confined to Kent and the Thames Valley but he gathered enough information to form some geographical sense of the island. He inaccurately described it as "triangular in form" but did show a relatively more accurate awareness of the area around the Irish Sea: "The west, on which part is Ireland, less, as is reckoned, than Britain, by one half: but the passage from it into Britain is of equal distance with that from Gaul. In the middle of this voyage, is an island, which is called Mona."**

**Mona probably refers to the Isle of Man but Caesar's most fascinating observations are of the Britons themselves. He considered the people of Kent to be the most "civilised" and that they did "not differ much from Gallic customs". In more general terms he gave a vivid account of the Britons' apparently earthy and fearsome appearances: "Most of the inland inhabitants do not sow corn, but live on milk and flesh and are clad with skins. All the Britons, indeed, dye themselves with wood, which occasions a bluish colour, and thereby have a more terrible appearance in fight. They wear their hair long, and have every part of their body shaved except their head and upper lip."**

*A 1574 depiction of Ancient British warriors. The blue woad is likely based on what Caesar wrote about the Britons*

*Images © Alamy*



# CAESAR vs POMPEY: RIVALS TO THE DEATH

## Pompey and Caesar were fierce rivals striving to be the first man in Rome. In the heated environment of the mid-first-century BCE, that rivalry would soon overflow into a bitter civil war

The Roman Republic, founded in 509 BCE, had seen crises before. Established on the principal of 'first among equals', where the foremost men of the Roman state strove with one another to contribute more, conquer more and be better than one another for the benefit of the state, it had lasted almost 500 years. In the late second century BCE, however, and with the advent of figures like the Gracchi brothers, Caius Marius and Sulla, the situation had altered. Now men strove to simply be first regardless of who got in their way, and considerations of what benefitted the state were secondary to what was of benefit to the individual.

Both Caesar and Pompey emerged in the aftermath of these upheavals. Pompey was a supporter (at a very young age) of Sulla, while Caesar was the nephew of Marius and the inheritor of a platform of support from the lower classes, known as the populares. Pompey, by contrast, was a member of the optimates – those who wanted the 'best men' to rule.

Pompey, born in 106 BCE, had already enjoyed a series of prestigious military commands. He was elected to the consulship, the highest political office in Rome, in 70 BCE, at the age of 35 – seven years before he should have been eligible. Caesar, however, only held his first political office that same year – as a tribune. Pompey had seen almost every success imaginable and expected that he be treated with due deference and be granted almost any wish. The times had changed, however, and Pompey discovered that he still needed to compete with ambitious men both younger and older than himself. Caesar was just one of those men.

Although only six years younger than Pompey, Caesar was a long way below him on the political ladder. Yet Caesar was ambitious and quick to seize on any opportunity, and wasn't above resorting to massive bribes. With such tactics he was elected to the office of pontifex maximus, Rome's highest priest. That should have been enough, but it wasn't. Caesar turned to Publius Licinius Crassus (the richest man in

*Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, Pompey the Great, was older than Caesar by six years but vastly more experienced and successful as a soldier*

© Alamy

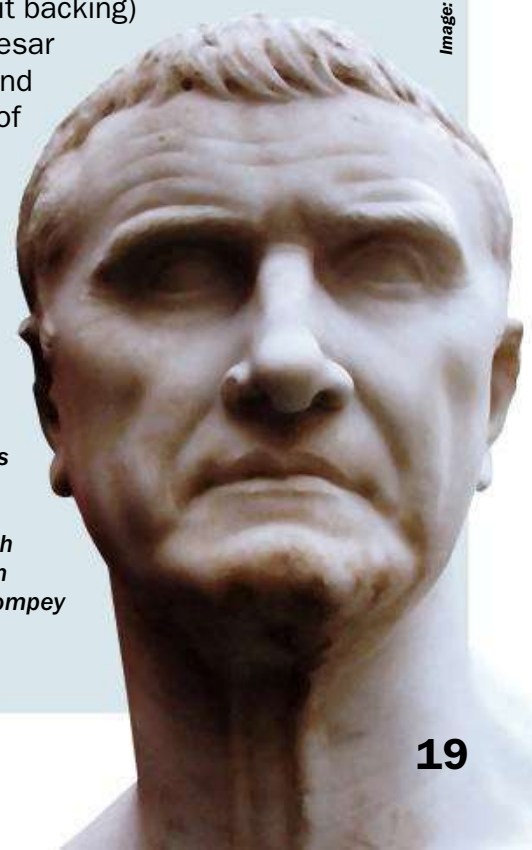
**"POMPEY HAD SEEN ALMOST EVERY SUCCESS IMAGINABLE AND EXPECTED THAT HE BE TREATED WITH DUE DEFERENCE – AND BE GRANTED ALMOST ANY WISH"**

Rome) to cover his debts. In return, Crassus sought Caesar's popular support against the interests of Pompey. Crassus and Pompey had been consuls together in 70 BCE (Crassus, born in 115 BCE, was of the correct age) but the two had fallen out.

Crassus was ambitious too – both he and Caesar wanted military as well as political glory. Pompey, meanwhile, was winning yet another war (this one against Mithridates of Pontus). When he returned from it, however, his decisions about treaties with kings in the east were opposed by his enemies in the senate (especially other rivals like Lucullus, Cato and Celer). Pompey, Crassus and Caesar, therefore, entered into a political alliance known as the First Triumvirate where they would pool their political support (and Crassus' financial weight) to divide political and military opportunities among themselves and with their supporters.

This was not an alliance of any shared platform – all three men in fact stood for very different things (although in a sign of the times, they stood for themselves first). The alliance was sealed with Pompey's marriage to Caesar's daughter Julia in 59 BCE.

With the support of Crassus and Pompey, Caesar was elected consul for 59 BCE – this was an acceleration of his political appointments (he was 40 so still two years younger than he should have been). Caesar ratified legislation in favour of Pompey and Crassus and secured himself the province of Cisalpine Gaul (with which he would launch his military ambitions – embarking on an invasion of Gaul in 58 BCE). Crassus and Pompey soon realised that they were still competing with Caesar's ambitions. Julia died in 54 BCE and things came to a head in 53 BCE when Crassus was killed in the east at the disastrous Battle of Carrhae. He had acted as a buffer between Caesar's and Pompey's egos but now he was dead things between them deteriorated rapidly. In 50 BCE, the Senate (with Pompey's tacit backing) demanded that Caesar disband his army and leave his province of Gaul, something Caesar would not do unless Pompey acted likewise with his army and province – Pompey refused. The die was cast.



*Marcus Licinius Crassus was the richest man in Rome and the third of the Triumvirs – his death allowed the competition between Caesar and Pompey to run unchecked*

*Image: Wiki / CC / PD*

# SIEGE OF ALESIA

## SEPTEMBER 52 BCE

The Gallic chieftain Vercingetorix chose the fortified settlement Alesia as the place where he would confront Julius Caesar and try to end the Roman conquest of Gaul once and for all

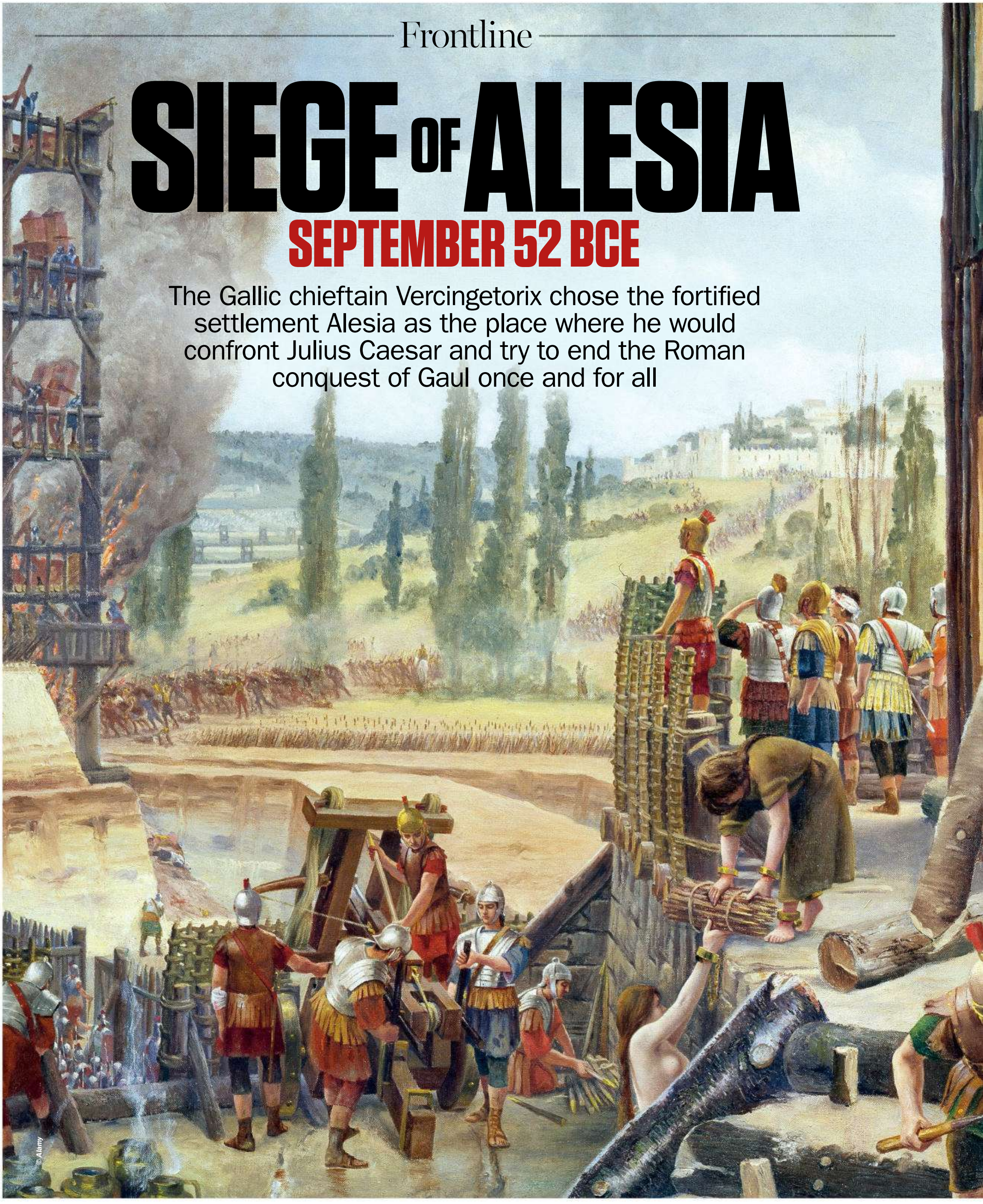


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Image: Wiki / CC / Myrabella

Julius Caesar first invaded Gaul in 58 BCE. Over the next few years his conquests were unstoppable but in 52 BCE Vercingetorix, a chieftain of the Gallic Arverni tribe (from the modern-day Auvergne region of France) united the Gallic tribes to resist the occupation by Caesar's legions. As soon as Vercingetorix came to power in early 52 BCE he formed an alliance of tribes who were wary of Roman domination. With Caesar distracted by events in Rome, Vercingetorix launched his campaign and defeated the Roman forces near his own capital of Gergovia (now Gergovie in the Auvergne). Our best source for the campaigns in Gaul remains Caesar's own account, *The Gallic Wars*, and he is understandably cagy about dwelling on a defeat (the Siege of Alesia is covered in *Book Seven*). Pursuing Caesar, Vercingetorix met with a reversal near the Saône River; he then moved to Alesia, capital of the Mandubii tribe, where he awaited more reinforcements to try to crush the Romans once and for all.

Caesar followed the Gauls to Alesia and began to build a massive circumvallation to surround the town and starve out Vercingetorix and his followers. This played directly into Vercingetorix's hands, however, as he sent word to his supporters to come and hammer Caesar against the anvil of Alesia. Caesar's preparations were monumental – completing 16km of wall and ditch to surround the Gallic hilltop stronghold. The wall included 23 towers and other devices to prevent harassment by Vercingetorix's cavalry, who attempted sallies to disrupt the work. Caesar was also aware that a relieving army was on the way, so he built another set of walls facing outwards towards the Gallic reinforcements – in total constructing 40km of fortifications (the outer wall was necessarily longer and was at least 21km in circumference). It was a race against time. In his account Caesar goes into meticulous detail on his siege works and the devices he used against the defenders, including trenches, booby-traps and sharpened stakes, all requiring vast amounts of men to build. Caesar gave exacting specifications for their construction, but archaeological excavations suggest that the actual works were not as meticulous or complete as he would have us believe.

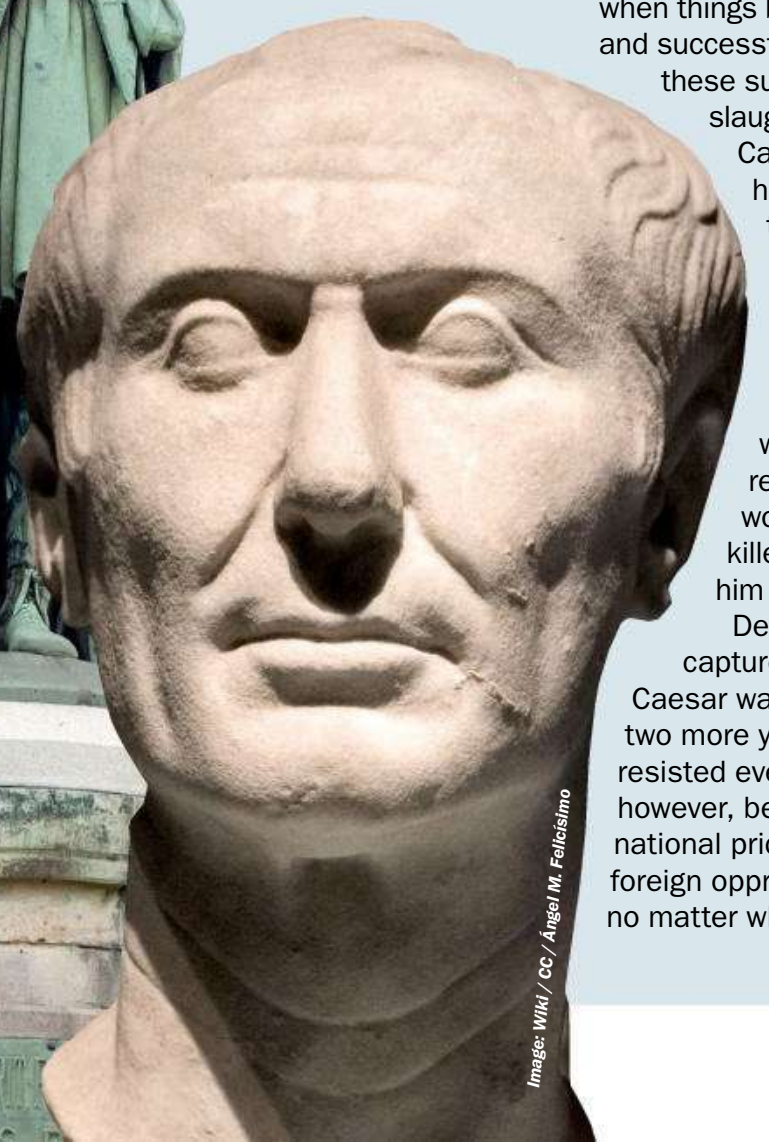
Inside Alesia, Vercingetorix had 80,000 men as well as the civilian population, so starvation could happen relatively quickly. Caesar had ten legions and supporting troops – more than 60,000 men in total – besieging them. According to Caesar, the Gallic relief army was almost 250,000-strong. Modern estimates reduce that number to around 70,000 but other ancient sources say it was even bigger – up to 400,000. Despite his efforts to ration grain and resources, Vercingetorix quickly began to run out of food.

The relief army arrived and, in coordination with the defenders trapped inside Alesia, both forces attacked the Roman siege works simultaneously. Despite attacking from both sides of the Roman fortifications and stretching the besiegers-turned-besieged very thin, the first assault was unsuccessful. This casts into doubt the troop numbers Caesar provides – his 60,000 men successfully resisting the concerted attacks of 330,000 Gauls in different places on his defences seems exaggerated to say the least.

Next, a night attack was attempted but it too failed. A third assault, aimed at an apparent weak point in the siege works, almost succeeded but Caesar's subordinate commanders, with Caesar himself joining when things became close, rallied their men and successfully repelled the attacks. With these successive defeats and massive slaughter (again we might question Caesar's numbers – he claims he has 250,000 Gauls killed during the entire operation), the relief army became disheartened and abandoned Vercingetorix. Left with no other option, he offered to sacrifice himself but Caesar ordered his surrender (along with the 40,000 men of his who remained). Vercingetorix did so and would remain a prisoner for six years, killed only after Caesar could parade him in his Triumph in 46 BCE.

Despite Vercingetorix's defeat and capture, Gallic resistance continued and Caesar was required to campaign in Gaul for two more years; there were some parts which resisted even beyond that. Vercingetorix, however, became revered as a figure of national pride, as a leader who stood up to foreign oppression and sought independence no matter what the cost.

***Left:** The seven-metre-tall Vercingetorix Monument (1865) was commissioned by Napoleon III as a symbol of Gallic nationalism, something the chieftain still represents today*

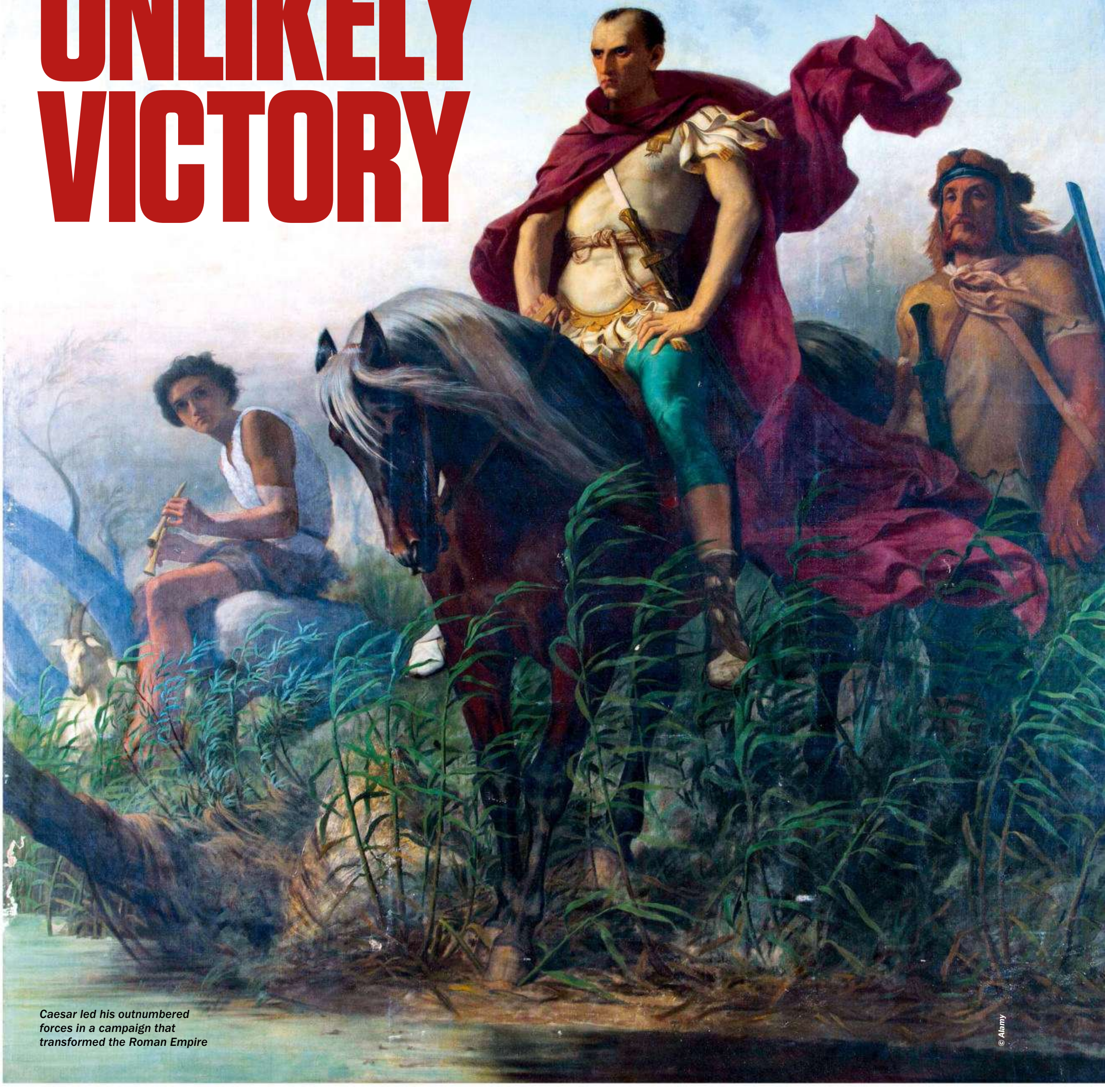


***Below:** A bust of Julius Caesar made during his lifetime (most post-date his death), the so-called Tusculum Portrait, was probably made only two years after his victory at Alesia*

Image: Wiki / CC / Ángel M. Felicísimo

# CAESAR'S UNLIKELY VICTORY

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon in January 49 BCE, he was a man alone against the Roman state led by the greatest soldier of his generation, Pompey – the odds were heavily stacked against him



*Caesar led his outnumbered forces in a campaign that transformed the Roman Empire*

© Alamy

Caesar should not have been able to emerge victorious in the civil war against Pompey. Pompey had more troops, more resources, more experience and the backing of more of the Roman Senate. What he did not have, however, was the sense of desperation that Caesar displayed. Caesar knew he had to act quickly to secure a victory. He also knew that he would need to put his own spin on his conduct; this had worked supremely well during his conquest of Gaul and in his own written account of those campaigns – *De Bello Gallico* (*The Gallic Wars)*. So he penned an account of the civil wars too to justify his behaviour.

It was not only a propaganda battle, however. Caesar had learned in his campaigns in Gaul (where he had been fighting continuously since 58 BCE) that his best tactics were to do what his enemy least expected and to be where his enemy least expected him to be. Therefore, despite having very few troops with him, he crossed the boundary of Italy and marched directly south, capturing Arminum, Fanum and Ancona in quick succession.

This boldness forced Pompey's hand and only two weeks later he left Rome for Luceria and then Brundisium and the Balkans. Caesar was hot on his heels – he captured Brundisium the day after Pompey's departure. Pompey should not have had to leave Rome, but he'd expected Caesar to take more time – something Caesar seldom did when it came to warfare. Caesar had caught Pompey and his supporters off-guard and they evacuated Italy.

Rather than cross after him, Caesar now surprised his opponents a second time: he retuned to Rome (being declared dictator) and then made straight for Spain. He knew the importance of securing his rear in a military campaign. Other subordinates secured Sardinia and Sicily and Caesar, in a series of lightning campaigns, conquered Spain by the end of the year.

Again Caesar wasted no time and in January 48 BCE he crossed into the Balkans. Pompey had had almost a year to prepare but Caesar's manner of crossing was, once again, unexpected. Caesar didn't have enough ships – he had 12 legions to transport across but the ships available could only fit 20,000 men and 500 cavalry. He crossed anyway.

Pompey had a massive fleet under his command and had amassed nine full-strength legions (approximately 45,000 men) and 7,000 cavalry. Caesar's 20,000 men represented seven (half-strength) legions and he had 500 cavalry and yet, with these massively outnumbered troops, he sought to oppose Pompey. Caesar's advantage was that his troops were veterans while only some of Pompey's men had seen action. Pompey's fleet was deployed to stop Caesar from crossing or finding an anchorage but Caesar did both – probably surprising his own officers as well. Pompey also had the resources of Greece and Thrace at his disposal to feed his army; his men were well-supplied while Caesar had to bring supplies with him or find them. Caesar knew, however, just how far he could push his veterans and what they could achieve in extremely challenging circumstances – Pompey had no such knowledge of his own troops.

As soon as he had landed Caesar yet again wasted no time: he took the city of Oricum before Pompey had even received news of Caesar's crossing. When the news finally reached him, Pompey withdrew to Dyrrachium. Caesar pursued him there and began to build a wall to trap him. This was similar to the tactics Caesar had used at Alesia but Pompey achieved a small victory because he had more men and could build a (shorter) counter-wall. Caesar's smaller force was determined to keep Pompey walled in, but Pompey was able to break out – Caesar simply didn't have the numbers to keep him in. The breakout of Pompey's forces forced Caesar to withdraw and, flushed with success, Pompey now pursued Caesar. Both armies therefore marched to Pharsalus.

Pompey held all the cards – he had more men and they had just won a victory over Caesar's troops. Caesar had shown, however, that he was capable of doing the unexpected at any time, and the decisive battle at Parsalus was no different. His hardened veterans overcame the superior numbers of Pompey's inexperienced troops and Caesar mixed infantry among his cavalry to thwart Pompey's numerical superiority there. Pompey should have known to expect the unexpected from Caesar but he had not learned that lesson.

**"CAESAR YET AGAIN WASTED NO TIME: HE TOOK THE CITY OF ORICUM BEFORE POMPEY HAD EVEN RECEIVED NEWS OF CAESAR'S CROSSING"**

*The Via Appia, just outside Rome. The road led straight to Brundisium (modern Brindisi) and Caesar took the port the day after Pompey left*

Image: Wiki / PD / Livioandronico2013

***Inset below:** The small River Rubicon marked the boundary of Italy. When Caesar crossed it with his troops, he was declaring war on the state (and Pompey)*

Image: Wiki / PD / Cicciotto

MUSSOLINI

# RISE OF FASCISM

*Professor Richard Bosworth, Emeritus Fellow at Jesus College, University of Oxford, reveals how Benito Mussolini's experience of WWI propelled him on the road to becoming fascist dictator of Italy*

© Alamy

*Mussolini was initially turned down when he volunteered for military service, but was then conscripted into the Italian Army in August 1915*

In the build-up to WWI, Italy had an uncertain place among the great states of Europe. "Italy was a rather idiosyncratic power," says Professor Richard Bosworth. "In my first book I called it the 'least of the great powers', which gives some sense of the country's ambiguous position. The Italians were technically allied to the Germans and Austrians in the Triple Alliance. However, Austria-Hungary ruled over Italian-speaking people around Trieste and the Trentino up towards the Brenner Pass. That meant it was always imaginable that if there was a conflict then Italy's place in the Triple Alliance would break down."

Before 1914, Italy was an ambitious nation but it was economically weak and socially divided. "It also had quite friendly relations with Britain and France but was a power that was showing signs of being on the make," says Bosworth. "In September-October 1911 it had attacked Ottoman-ruled Libya without a declaration of war and seized it to expand its empire, with much emphasis on how Ancient Rome had once ruled that area.

"However, Italy was a very fragile country. It didn't have energy resources such as coal, was always dependent on imports and had the weakest economy of the other five great European powers. As a society, the Italians were only very partially nationalised. If you tried to assess most of their identities, it mostly depended on family and locality rather than as a nation. It was a heavily peasant country with considerable portions of the population being illiterate, particularly the further south you went. For these many reasons, Italy was quite an ambiguous great power, with Benito Mussolini later describing in a football metaphor whether the country was bottom of the first division or in danger of relegation."

In 1914, Mussolini was a fervent young socialist who worked as a strident journalist. "He was then the editor of the Socialist Party's main newspaper *Avanti!* ('*Forward!*') where he tended to be on the radical, revolutionary side of the socialist movement," says Bosworth. "In June 1914 there was a series of anarcho-socialist uprisings in Italian towns and Mussolini editorially enthused about these matters. He said in a famous phrase that Italy was 'quite ready for revolution'."

In the wake of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo, Mussolini was largely distracted by internal Italian politics but gradually developed a sense of the impending war. "During the July Crisis, he was still talking about these uprisings but did notice the assassination. Once the other great powers were at war he occasionally commented on it in *Avanti!*. He was critical of German militarism and wrote an article where he was appalled by the Germans' alleged brutality as they moved into Brussels. He was also very critical of Russia as a reactionary country that you wouldn't want to get too close to. These early war articles are a little contradictory or embarrassed by the difficulty of trying to work out what the war might mean for a revolutionary socialist like him."

***Left top:** A military parade accompanies Mussolini opening the reconstruction of the Ara Pacis monument in Rome, October 1938*

In October 1914, Mussolini fully committed to supporting Italy's potential entry into the war but he fell foul of his fellow socialists. "He wrote an article in *Avanti!* saying that neutrality wouldn't work because the war offered an opportunity for revolution and grandeur. This was not the official policy of the Socialist Party but it took about a month for them to expel him."

Mussolini left *Avanti!* but received support from prosperous northern Italians who wanted to join the war on the side of the Triple Entente powers. He was given finances to begin a pro-war newspaper in Milan called *Il Popolo d'Italia* ('*The People of Italy*'). "The idea of 'People' rather than 'Class' was a reference back to the nationalist philosopher Giuseppe Mazzini, who participated in Italian unification during the 1860s-70s. Mussolini became a fervent fan of Italy entering the war but with the qualification that there must also be a revolution with changes from the old liberal parliamentary system."

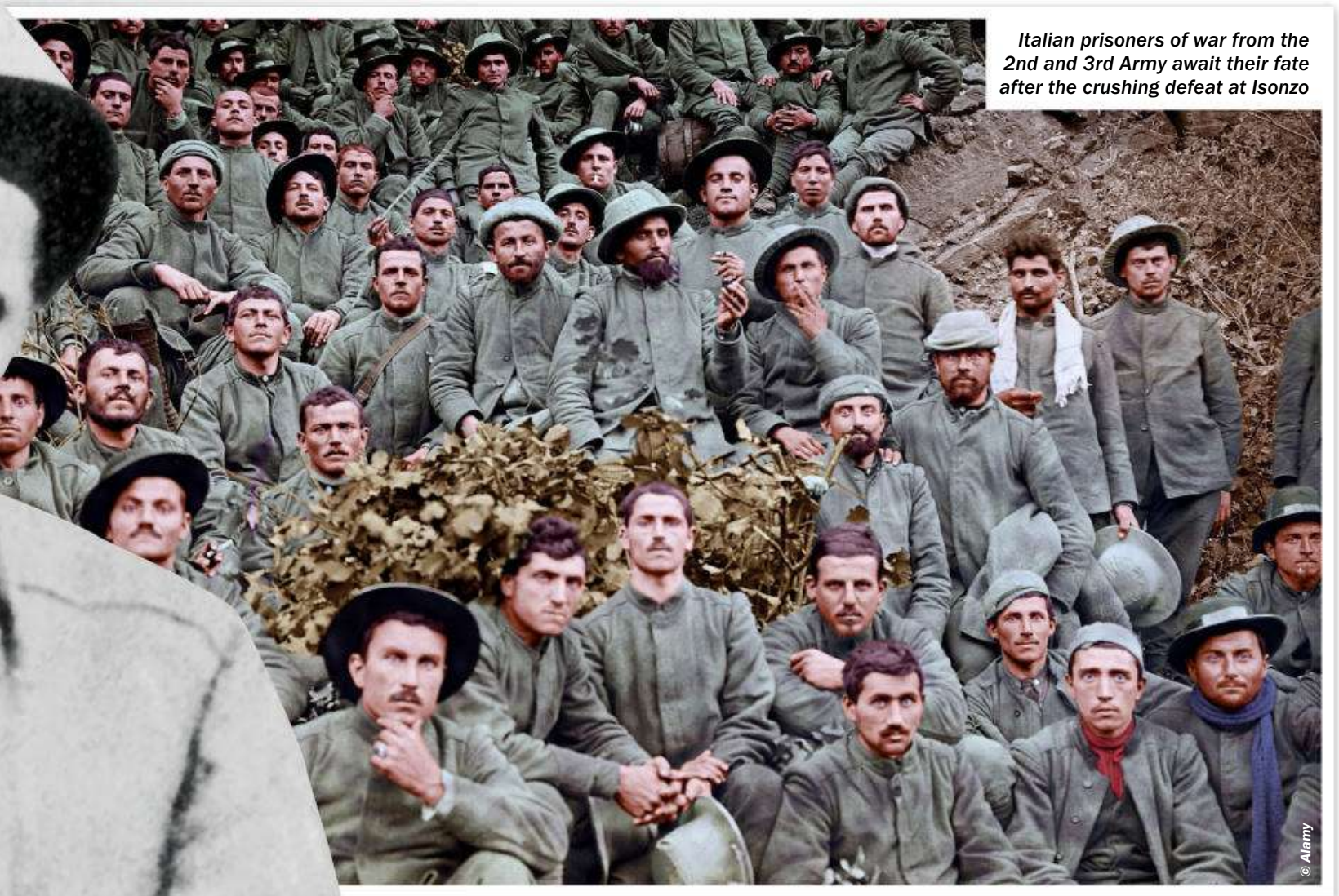
*Il Popolo d'Italia* was published throughout WWI and Mussolini used his editorial position to trumpet his pro-war views. But Bosworth says its impact on Italian public opinion was limited: "One shouldn't exaggerate the influence of *Il Popolo d'Italia* between November 1914 to May 1915 because it was one of the numerous newspapers that preached in favour of war. The young Mussolini was ambitious but it was really the Italian intelligentsia that were tempted by the war because they sensed an opportunity for themselves."

## Italy at war

In May 1915, Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary in an act that Bosworth says needs reassessing: "It was an act of complete aggression, which Italian historians don't say very often, but it was. Austria hadn't invaded Italy, it was Italy that decided to declare war on Austria. Most of the rhetoric behind it was about making the nation 'whole' by getting the natural geographical borders that 'God' had allegedly defined for Italy on the Brenner Pass, Trieste and Istria etc."

Despite the aggressive rhetoric, Bosworth says most Italians were unenthusiastic about the conflict: "It was liberal politicians backed by a noisy intelligentsia, including people like Mussolini, who made the decision to go to war but they were a minority. The great majority of Italians were by no means enthusiastic. Perhaps half of them were peasants who had no idea where Austria was or what it meant. They may not have even had an idea of what 'Italy' actually meant because their focus was on localities and families."

Italy would later declare war on Germany in September 1916 but the majority of its war



*Italian prisoners of war from the 2nd and 3rd Army await their fate after the crushing defeat at Isonzo*

© Alamy

was fought against the Austro-Hungarians along its northern border. The Italian Army had fewer than 300,000 men at the beginning of the war but it would increase in size to over five million by November 1918. This was a huge national effort and, in a grim symmetry with the rest of the conflict, the Italians suffered terribly. Their armed forces incurred 1.4 million casualties in just over three years, with approximately 460,000 killed and 955,000 wounded.

Like elsewhere during WWI, the experience of Italian soldiers, primarily in northern Italy, was mostly attritional. However, they fought in uniquely difficult conditions. "Italy's First World War has been obscured by Anglo-centric memories of the war. We think of Flanders, trenches in flat, swampy, wintry territory or the considerable movement of the Russian front. The Italians were instead fighting in mountains or rocky hills. The conditions were very bad and extreme in a geographical sense because there wasn't much you could do during an Alpine winter battle with snow."

Compounding the Italians' terrain problems were their own social divisions. "Italy was a class-divided nation where the majority of soldiers were peasants. There was a lack of meaning between officers and men, with the men literally speaking different languages and local dialects. This was opposed to the national language which was the language of command and the officers. There is plenty of evidence of officers going off and having nice dinners at the front while the poor men have trouble getting properly fed. The Italian Army of 1915-16 was also not much given to allowing men to have time back at base to recover. It tended to leave them there at the front and it was certainly not a nice place to be."

## Mussolini's military service

Once Italy entered the war, Mussolini was initially turned down for military service, despite volunteering. "It was a slightly complicated situation. He talked about volunteering in his paper and wrote a letter to a more important intellectual about if he wasn't allowed to join the army then he'd go over the border and volunteer for the French. There is evidence that the Italian government and officials were still suspicious of Mussolini as a socialist revolutionary. *Il Popolo d'Italia* didn't remove the word 'socialist' from its masthead until 1918 so you can see why they might have some doubt."

Bosworth contrasts Mussolini's initial military rejection with that of his younger brother Arnaldo: "Arnaldo was an important person himself. He was promoted to editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia* after 1922 and remained Mussolini's man of business until he died in 1931. During the war, Arnaldo had been training as a minor bureaucrat in the middle classes and was sent to officer school when he was called up. By contrast, Benito never went to officer school because he was still deemed a proletarian socialist."

***Left:** Mussolini poses with rifle and bayonet c.1915. He was wounded in February 1917*

© Getty

# BERSAGLIERI

## This flamboyantly dressed infantry unit traces its origins to the earliest years of Italian unification and follows the traditions of Napoleonic light infantry and sharpshooters

*Bersaglieri hats are perhaps among the most recognisable pieces of uniform in Europe*

The history of the Bersaglieri goes back to the first half of the 19th century, before Italy was unified. "They were one of the more celebrated parts of the Italian infantry," Professor Bosworth told History of War. "Rather typically of the Italian Army, their history went back to before Italy became a united nation state, to Piedmont. This was the country that would lead Italian unification. In some senses, they were reflective of the Italian monarchy which was the Piedmontese Savoy dynasty."

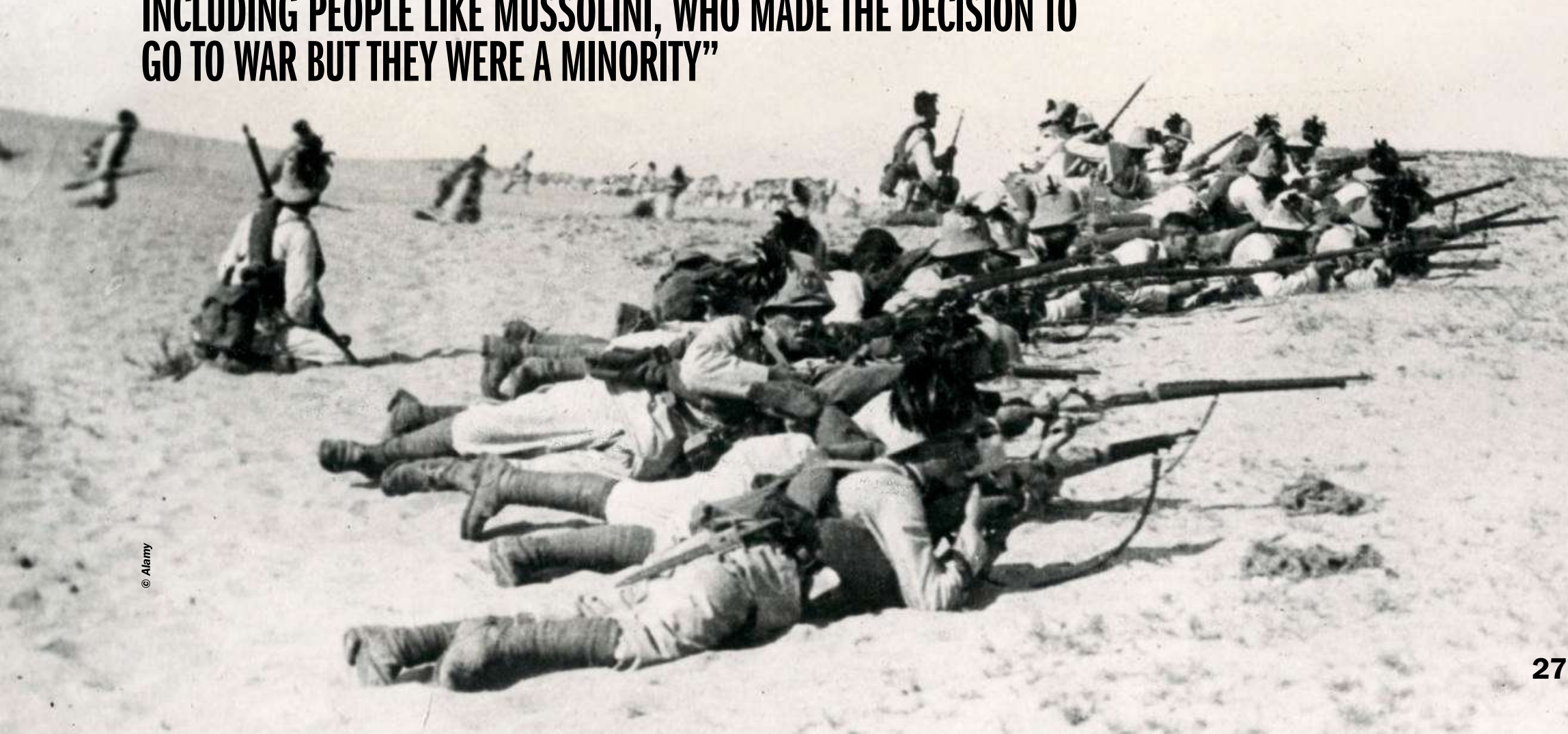
The unit was first conceived by an officer in the Kingdom of Sardinia, named Captain Alessandro Ferrero. On 18 June 1836, he petitioned King Carlo Alberto to form a new corps of elite infantry, based on the successful principles of maneuverable light infantry regiments, such as Britain's 'Green Jackets' and France's Voltigeurs. Likewise, as well as being selected for their precise aim, Bersaglieri soldiers were tasked with reconnaissance and path-finding for the main army.

As well as dark uniforms, to better blend in with their surroundings, the Bersaglieri also wear seemingly flamboyant hats, called "cappello piumato" (this is simply translated as "feathered hat" in English), or also a "Vajra" after one of the first Bersaglieri. The hats were also reinforced with a steel bar inside the fabric, to protect from downward blows.

The Bersaglieri were critical during the Italian Wars of Reunification, between 1848-1870. By the end of the 19th century, they were equipped with bicycles to increase their mobility, and later these were upgraded again to motorcycles. During the First World War, the Bersaglieri were heavily involved in some of the bloodiest battles involving Italy. "They had very heavy casualties during the First World War," said Professor Bosworth. "Perhaps 40 per cent of them were killed or wounded during the war but they were the 'Poor bloody infantry' who had to do a lot of the ordinary fighting."

During the Second World War the Bersaglieri were again involved in Italy's major campaigns, including in North Africa. Several Bersaglieri were part of the Western Desert Campaign, including the 9th Bersaglieri Regiment, which fought as part of the 101st Motorized "Trieste" Division. The 9th was entirely wiped out during the Second Battle of El Alamein, in 1942. Since the Second World War, certain Bersaglieri regiments have been reconstituted and took part in the War in Iraq as well as NATO operations.

## "IT WAS LIBERAL POLITICIANS BACKED BY A NOISY INTELLIGENTSIA, INCLUDING PEOPLE LIKE MUSSOLINI, WHO MADE THE DECISION TO GO TO WAR BUT THEY WERE A MINORITY"




*Bersaglieri soldiers photographed in Palestine, during the First World War*

Mussolini's attempt to volunteer failed but he was soon conscripted into the Italian Army in August 1915. He joined the Bersaglieri infantry corps and was quickly dispatched to the Isonzo River valley on the eastern sector of the Italian front. During October-November 1915 he took part in the Third Battle of the Isonzo, which was one of ultimately 12 successive battles that were fought in the area.

The Italians planned to break into Slovenian territory along the Isonzo because it was one of the few areas that were not dominated by Austro-Hungarian mountainous defences. However, like everywhere else on the Italian front, the battles became highly attritional and saw huge casualties. The Italians deployed both 2nd and 3rd Army against the Austro-Hungarians on the Isonzo and suffered an estimated 645,000 casualties by November 1917. Combat was almost continuous in this area with victories seesawing between the Italians and Austro-Hungarians – the latter won the final, twelfth battle that was better known as the Battle of Caporetto.

Although Mussolini was fighting on the front lines of the Isonzo sector in late 1915 he was still very much working as a journalist. "He was somehow getting copy back to *Il Popolo d'Italia* in Milan and tended to write rather positive things about how the officers really liked him. It wasn't long until he was promoted to corporal and later to the Italian equivalent of sergeant."

Key to Mussolini's frontline journalism was a wartime diary he kept that was later known as *Diario di Guerra*. "He kept the diary from the moment he went to the front until he was invalided out. It was regularly published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* at that time, and after he became prime minister and dictator of Italy it was turned into one of the 'manuals' of the new regime."

Bosworth also says this war diary helped to form Mussolini's political identity and further showcased his writing abilities: "It had quite an important life in making the case that Mussolini was the ultimate 'ordinary' soldier. It mattered that he wasn't an officer or perhaps even a monarchist but that he was his own man. One shouldn't underestimate his intellectual skills as a writer. He was a very good journalist who had managed to double or even triple *Avanti!*'s circulation in two years. In the diary, he started writing in very short sentences with staccato phrasing. It became a model for fascist regimes with an emphasis on machines and modernity in a way that was quite interesting."

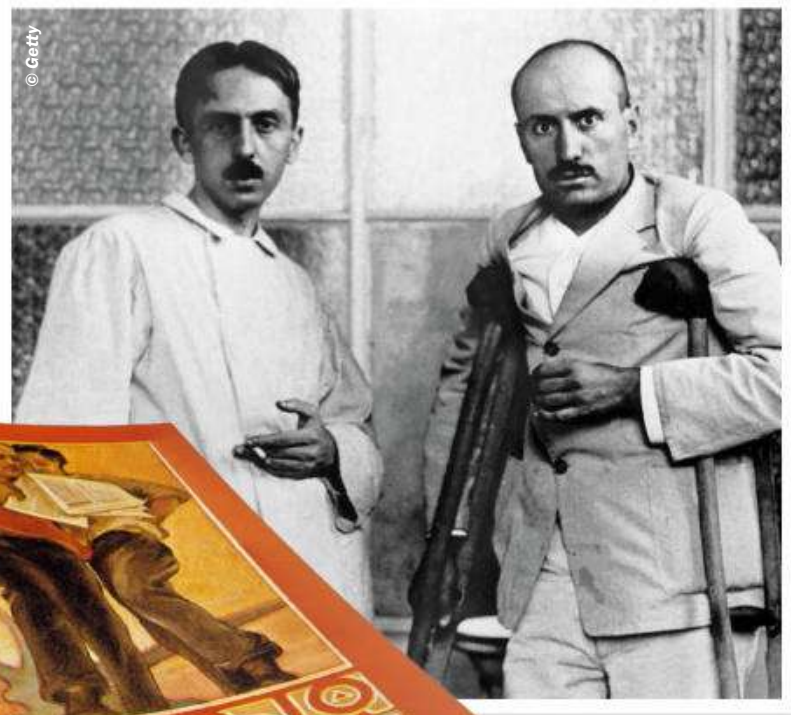
Nevertheless, despite his prolific self-aggrandisement, Mussolini was perhaps not quite as popular or even as 'ordinary' a soldier as he made himself out to be. "He claimed that the soldiers liked him because he was so audacious and positive about war but there is evidence that says the reverse. The men were very suspicious of this journalist who they couldn't quite place in class, regional or family terms. In other words, they couldn't place him in terms of what really mattered to them. To me, that seems to probably be the more credible situation."

Mussolini suffered many of the privations of his fellow soldiers and at one point contracted paratyphoid fever. This was, according to Bosworth, "a typical example of the conditions

*Italian troops around the time of the Battle of Caporetto, 1917, in which they were defeated by the Austro-Hungarians*

© Alamy

“MUSSOLINI CLAIMED THAT THE SOLDIERS LIKED HIM BECAUSE HE WAS SO AUDACIOUS AND POSITIVE ABOUT WAR, BUT THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT SAYS THE REVERSE”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*Top:* *Mussolini (right) in a military hospital in 1917. During his time in power he made much of the wounds he suffered during the conflict*

***Above, right:*** *Italian soldiers on the retreat after their defeat at Caporetto, November 1917*

***Above:*** *Mussolini received financial backing to start the pro-war newspaper Il Popolo d'Italia*

**"SURPRISINGLY, GIVEN HIS MAJOR CONFLICT WITH BRITAIN DURING WWII, HE WAS REGULARLY PAID BY THE BRITISH SECURITY SERVICE MI5"**

*A painting depicting dead Austro-Hungarian soldiers after one of the 12 battles at Isonzo*

he was fighting in". He remained on active service until February 1917, when he was badly wounded. "There was an explosion when they were practising behind the front. During his regime, Mussolini made much of the wounding and talked about 40 'heroic' wounds. Whatever the truth, he did seem to have had damage to a leg that remained with him for the rest of his life."

## Mussolini and MI5

After being wounded, Mussolini was sent to a hospital where he reputedly met the "extremely uncharismatic" King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy while he was on a royal visit. Rumours later emerged that Mussolini, who was a notorious womaniser, was actually being treated for venereal disease during his time in hospital. "One of the curious things is that there are accusations of syphilis. About 15 years ago, an Irish historian claimed that you could find conspiratorial evidence that Mussolini was kept in hospital longer than he should have been because they were actually trying to cure him of syphilis rather his wounds. However, the great majority of evidence seems to show that this was not the case. Therefore, he was probably just wounded and took a little while to recover."

Following his release from hospital, Mussolini was invalided out of the army and returned to editing *Il Popolo d'Italia* for the rest of the war. Surprisingly, given his major conflict with Britain during WWII, he was regularly paid by the British security service MI5. Bosworth explains that this arrangement was not as extraordinary as it appears: "He seems to have received a stipend of £100 a week, which was a reasonable amount of money in 1917-18. The French secret service had been financing *Il Popolo d'Italia* from the beginning of the war so in a sense the British were only joining their French colleagues.

"I don't think there's any evidence of a conspiracy for Mussolini to speak out in favour of British interests. There is no evidence of any undercover work or what that even might have been. It's more that the British were just giving some kind of subsidy to a pro-war, anti-German journalist. Italy had been slow to enter the war against Germany but by 1918 Mussolini was certainly writing often about how evil German culture was and how Italians should fight to the death. It's all the more fascinating because the agent who seems to have paid him was Samuel Hoare who was later British Foreign Secretary when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935."

## Italy after WWI

Italy was one of the Allied victors at the end of WWI but the conflict had done nothing but exacerbate the country's instability. "Italy in 1919 was left in a very difficult situation in almost every respect. The Italian government had spent more money fighting WWI than it spent between the foundation of Italy and 1913. That's quite a statistic to grapple with and there was a lot of inflation. When the soldiers were demobilised there was massive unemployment. The socialists, trade and Catholic unions suddenly grew in size and Italy quickly had to confront the issue of what to do about all these protesting unions."

Italy may have been technically victorious but its contribution to the Allies was sidelined at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. "The Italian prime minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and foreign minster Sidney Sonnino got so annoyed with the other Allies that Italy wasn't getting enough rewards for winning WWI that they returned to Rome. They thought that Britain, France and the United States would invite them back and start giving them rewards such as in Asia Minor or something similar. However, the other Allies said: 'Thank goodness the Italians aren't here' and continued cheerfully negotiating among themselves. The two Italian leaders then had to creep back after a while."

This geopolitical weakness was matched by domestic political turbulence. "By 1919 Italy was entering a world of mass politics and at the end of the year there were elections that symbolised the political problems. About half of the seats in the chamber of deputies were shared between two modern mass parties. One was the Socialist Party, which jumped to being the largest political party in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house in the Italian Parliament) and the other was a new Catholic party that was led by a priest. The other half of the chamber consisted of liberals of different persuasions. They were men who had connections to newspapers or local authorities and they tried to manipulate the world around patron-client networks."

In this complicated political atmosphere it was believed that Italian politics would veer to the far-left. "In 1919-20 it became customary to call those two years the Biennio Rosso ('The Red Two Years'). It looked in many ways that Italy was somehow going to go the way of Russia. After all, Italy had also suffered a grave military defeat that just about coincided with the Bolshevik Revolution at the Battle of Caporetto in 1917. That defeat had driven the Italians back to about only 35km from Venice.

"Overall, the Italian economy, culture and society was in trouble after the war and in area after area there were massive complications and possibilities. The socialists were using the word 'revolution' very loudly and great questions were being asked. What was Italy meant to be for? What had the war been fought for? Was Italy still a great power? You had the liberal prime minister Orlando saying in November 1918 that victory marked the greatest political and social revolution that Italy had ever had. If a liberal was saying that then it's a symbol of how unstable things had become and how necessary it was for a new form of words to be crafted to explain Italy to Italians."

## Emergence of fascism

During this febrile post-war period, fascism as a political force was emerging, although it had been developing in various ways before

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*Mussolini was arrested in Rome in 1915 during a pro-war rally to bring Italy into WWI*

***Left:** Mussolini pictured during the First World War where he served in the infantry*

and during the war. "The word 'fascio' had been around in Italian politics for decades and during WWI there was a left-wing interventionist group called the Group for Revolutionary Action. They were created in 1918 and Mussolini became a supporter of theirs. They tended not to be socialist trade unionists but syndicalists who wanted some different form of unionism from the one provided by the Socialist Party. They were in favour of intervention in the war to create some sort of new society or revolution.

"There was also a Parliamentary Union for National Defence. At least 150 liberal Italian Members of Parliament belonged to that, including the famous liberal editor of *Corriere della Sera*, Luigi Albertini. He talked about how politics was 'now in the hands of fascists', by which he meant people who wanted to defend the nation and conduct the war in as an efficient and modern way as possible."

By 1919, there were approximately 16 different 'fasci' movements of different ideological persuasions with Mussolini assiduously writing about them. "There was an anarchist one, one for middle-school members and even one for doctors so the word 'fascism' didn't mean anything yet. However, in *Il Popolo d'Italia* you can find almost anything you like. Mussolini was a journalist, wrote a lot and had to fill in his copy somehow. There is a sense that he was looking for a revolution that would somehow create a mass age for Italy and some form of modernity."

It was during this immediate period after the war that Mussolini's later fascist ideology began to take a recognisable form. "He was becoming more nationalistic and violent. The images of him as an editor in 1919 have him

**"THE ARRIVAL OF FASCISM AS A MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE WAS A SIGNIFICANT TURNING POINT IN EUROPEAN HISTORY WITH ADOLF HITLER ADOPTING MANY ASPECTS OF THE ITALIAN FASCIST MOVEMENT TO ACHIEVE POWER IN GERMANY"**

sitting in his office with grenades on his desk and a rifle in his hands. There was violence all over Italy in 1919 and there had been a lot of social violence before 1914. Mussolini was certainly willing to use violence because he remained ambitious."

A turning point came in March 1919 when Mussolini founded the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento ('Italian Fasces of Combat') movement in Milan. "It was established in a hall that was provided by a Jewish businessman, which is interesting considering later developments. It brought together a motley group, including Marinetti and Vecchi for a brief time before they broke with Mussolini. Those two were even more violently active than Mussolini because they went off and sacked the Milan HQ of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* that Mussolini had been editor of in 1914."

Fuelling this new fascist movement were many WWI veterans who became active members. Bosworth considers that these

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*Mussolini (right) pictured relaxing with comrades during a lull in the fighting*
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men were motivated by a need to oppose the many left-wing movements in Italy at that time: "There were inevitably plenty of ex-soldiers in the fascist movement. It arose during 1919-22 as an essentially anti-Marxist, anti-socialist and anti-communist movement and part of that was the situation of returned soldiers. If you were a peasant soldier, particularly after Caporetto, there was a much greater effort to fight to slightly improve the appalling conditions at the front. Many then returned to their villages to discover that the local peasants had been converted to socialism. The socialists were talking about strikes and revolution but many veterans wanted to join a movement to oppose that so they became fascists."

Although many veterans did become fascists there were also many that did not. "There was a national body for returned soldiers that looked very important in 1919-20 but it gradually became more feeble. Some veterans of course did not support the fascists' use of violence and didn't approve of the fascist organisations who were trying to help landowners in northern Italy to repress unionised Marxist peasants."

Veterans, including Mussolini, were an important factor in the emergence of fascism as the dominating force in Italian politics. It was later reflected in the makeup of the fascist regime's leadership. "Its interesting in class terms because many leading figures in the regime such as Dino Brandi and Giuseppe Bottai were in the army during WWI. However, they were always officers from lieutenant up whereas Mussolini of course wasn't an officer. The only other leading fascist who was like Mussolini was his tough rival Roberto Farinacci who was sometimes seen as the more radical fascist revolutionary in the regime."

## "A serious intellectual"

Mussolini's leadership of the fascist movement ultimately led him to become Italian prime minister in 1922 following the 'March on Rome' in the October of that year. The arrival of fascism as a major political force was a significant turning point in European history, with Adolf Hitler adopting many aspects of the Italian fascist movement to achieve power in Germany. Like Mussolini, Hitler was a WWI veteran but his experience of the conflict is much better known than those of his Italian counterpart.

Bosworth considers that although Hitler's war record has received greater attention, it was Mussolini who was far more important by 1919: "Mussolini's WWI experience is more obscure simply because Italy didn't matter as much as Germany later on. Once Hitler came to power in 1933 the independent nature of Fascist Italy tended to dwindle away. However, during WWI, Mussolini was a vastly more serious figure in Italy than Hitler was in Germany. Hitler didn't matter at all and no one knew about him whereas people had heard of Mussolini. He was five years older than Hitler and gave every sign by 1919 of being a serious intellectual both culturally and politically. Hitler was then just a strange little man who was coming out of the trenches and trying to work out what to do with himself. It was Mussolini who was overwhelmingly the senior figure, although he didn't know anything about Hitler in 1919 and Hitler knew nothing about him."

Mussolini had a militarily insignificant experience as a soldier during WWI but Bosworth contends the conflict's impact did ultimately swiftly enable him to achieve power in Italy: "The effect of Mussolini's war on European history is a massive question. However, the obvious answer is that the word 'fascism' – with all its ambiguities, confusions and multiplicities in 1919 – does get vastly reinforced by the curious nature of Italy's First World War and Mussolini's experience of it. In October 1922, Mussolini was still not yet 40 years old but he had become prime minister of Italy. By 1925 he had become a dictator and 'fascism' is the word that is used to describe the regime."

**Richard Bosworth is the author of many books about Benito Mussolini and other aspects of Italian history. His works include *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism* and his most recent biography *Claretta: Mussolini's Last Lover*, both of which are published by Yale University Press.**
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# KULIKOVO

## Grand Prince Dimitri of Moscow's Russian army outfought the Golden Horde in a desperate clash that shattered the myth of Mongol invincibility

WORDS WILLIAM E WELSH

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The fog hung thick over the waters of the Don River on the morning of 8 September 1380. Long columns of Russian soldiers filed through a ford on the Don just below where the Nepravda River fed into it. They tramped a mile past the ford and deployed for battle opposite the waiting Mongol army of the Golden Horde.

The leader of the Russian host, Grand Prince Dimitri of Moscow, addressed his men, urging them to fight for their Orthodox faith. "Brothers, God is our refuge and our strength," he said. Then, out of the view of his troops, he discreetly exchanged suits of armour with a young Muscovite aristocrat, Mikhail Brenok. Brenok would take the grand prince's place at the centre of the army beneath the banners of the Virgin Mary, St George and St Andrew.

Dimitri did this because he knew that his Mongol adversaries on the battlefield would seek to kill him as quickly as possible. If the Mongols could cut down the charismatic leader of the Russian army, it was likely the men in the ranks would panic and flee the battlefield.

For that reason, the 30-year-old grand prince decided that it was better to fight in the centre of the army as a nondescript nobleman rather than risk death at the outset of the battle. Accompanied by a handful of mounted aides to carry messages to his captains, he took up a position not too far from where Brenok was located under the grand prince's banner.

## Golden Horde rivalry

Batu Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, had undertaken a two-year conquest of Kievan Rus that ended in 1240. This had begun what would be nearly two-and-a-half centuries of Mongol overlordship over the divided Russian principalities in Eastern Europe. Batu Khan founded the Khanate of the Golden Horde, the westernmost of the four appanages given to Genghis Khan's four eldest sons upon his death.

The Mongols allowed the Russians a degree of self-government because they didn't want to administer their domains, but as overlords they collected tribute on a regular basis. In addition, they could compel their Russian vassals at any time to provide troops for Mongol military campaigns.

The Golden Horde actually consisted of two parts, known as wings. Batu ruled the western wing known as the Blue Horde, while his brother, Orda Khan, controlled the eastern wing known as the White Horde. Batu established his capital at Sarai on the lower Volga River. To round out their armies, the Mongols recruited and integrated Turkic warriors into their armies. The Russians called the Turkic-Mongol warriors Tatars.

The peak of the Golden Horde's power came in the first half of the 14th century under Khan Uzbek, but after his death in 1341 factions began vying with each other for power. The power struggle weakened the Blue Horde and

*Russian armoured cavalry and Mongol lancers charged and counter-charged for nearly two hours*

## OPPOSING FORCES

### MUSCOVITE ARMY

**COMMANDER**
Grand Prince Dimitri of Moscow

**CAVALRY**
25,000

**INFANTRY**
15,000

**TOTAL**
40,000

VS

### MONGOL GOLDEN HORDE

**COMMANDER**
Emir Mamai

**LIGHT CAVALRY**
40,000

**HEAVY CAVALRY**
15,000

**INFANTRY**
5,000

**TOTAL**
60,000

allowed the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to gain territory at its expense.

In the second half of the 14th century the Russian principalities slowly began to recover from the Mongol invasion while the Golden Horde began to decline, in part because of internal instability.

Only those who were directly descended from Genghis Khan could become Mongol khans. The Mongol warlord Mamai, who took control of the Blue Horde in 1367, did so under a succession of puppet khans. His rule was challenged by the rise of Tokhtamysh, who seized the throne of the White Horde in 1378, just two years before the clash at Kulikovo. In a bid to unite the two hordes, Tokhtamysh captured Sarai.

Owing to the loss Sarai, Mamai's position became increasingly weak. He needed to retake Sarai to restore his reputation. In preparation for war against Tokhtamysh, Mamai sought to squeeze as much tribute as possible from his Russian vassals to fund his war with Tokhtamysh.

## The rise of Moscow

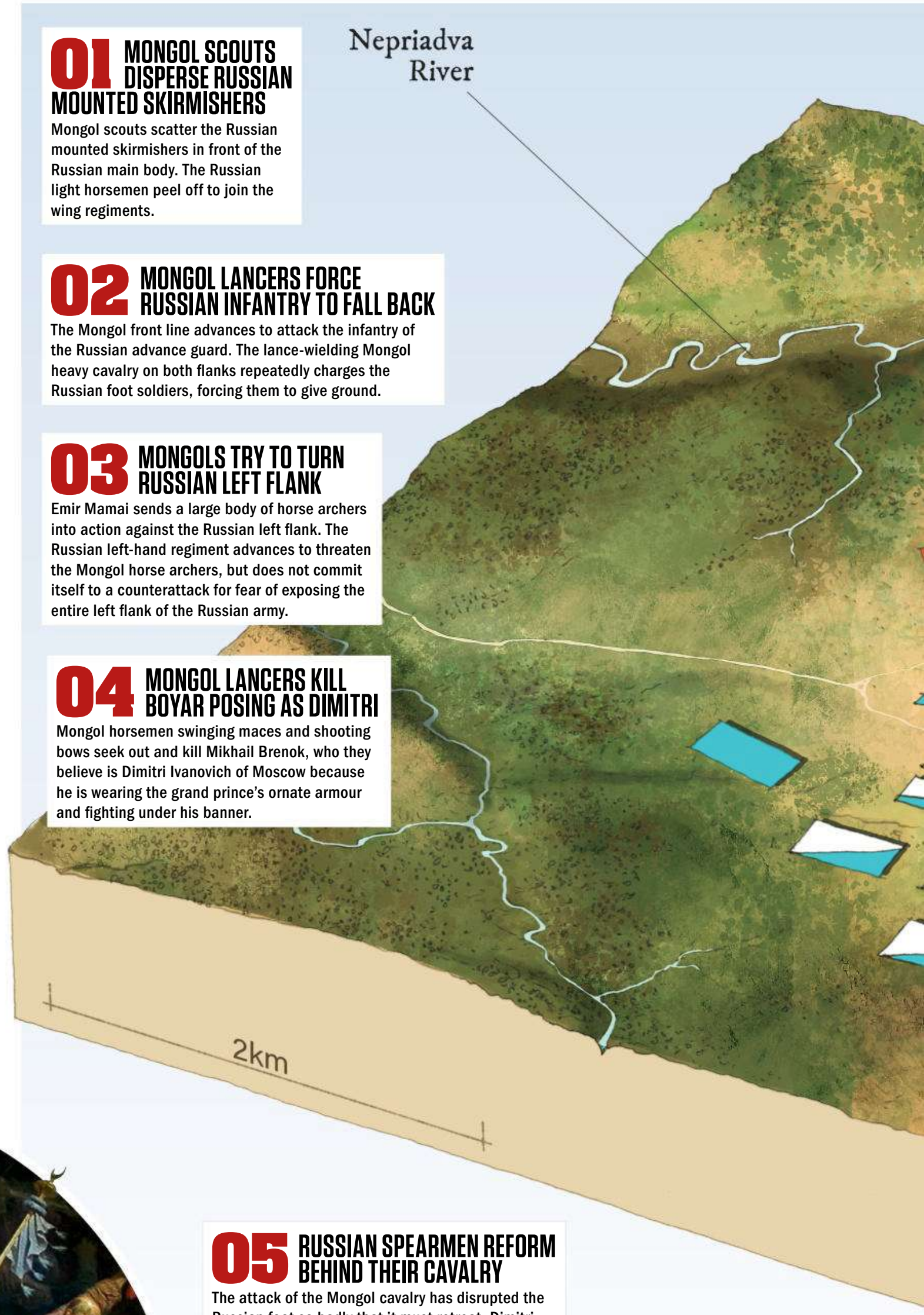
The town of Moscow was founded in the mid-12th century as a military outpost in the Principality of Vladimir. It steadily grew in importance to the point that it became the seat of a new principality in 1263. One of the most important reasons for its rise in prominence was that the Orthodox Church transferred the metropolitan (archbishopric) seat from Kiev to Moscow in 1328.

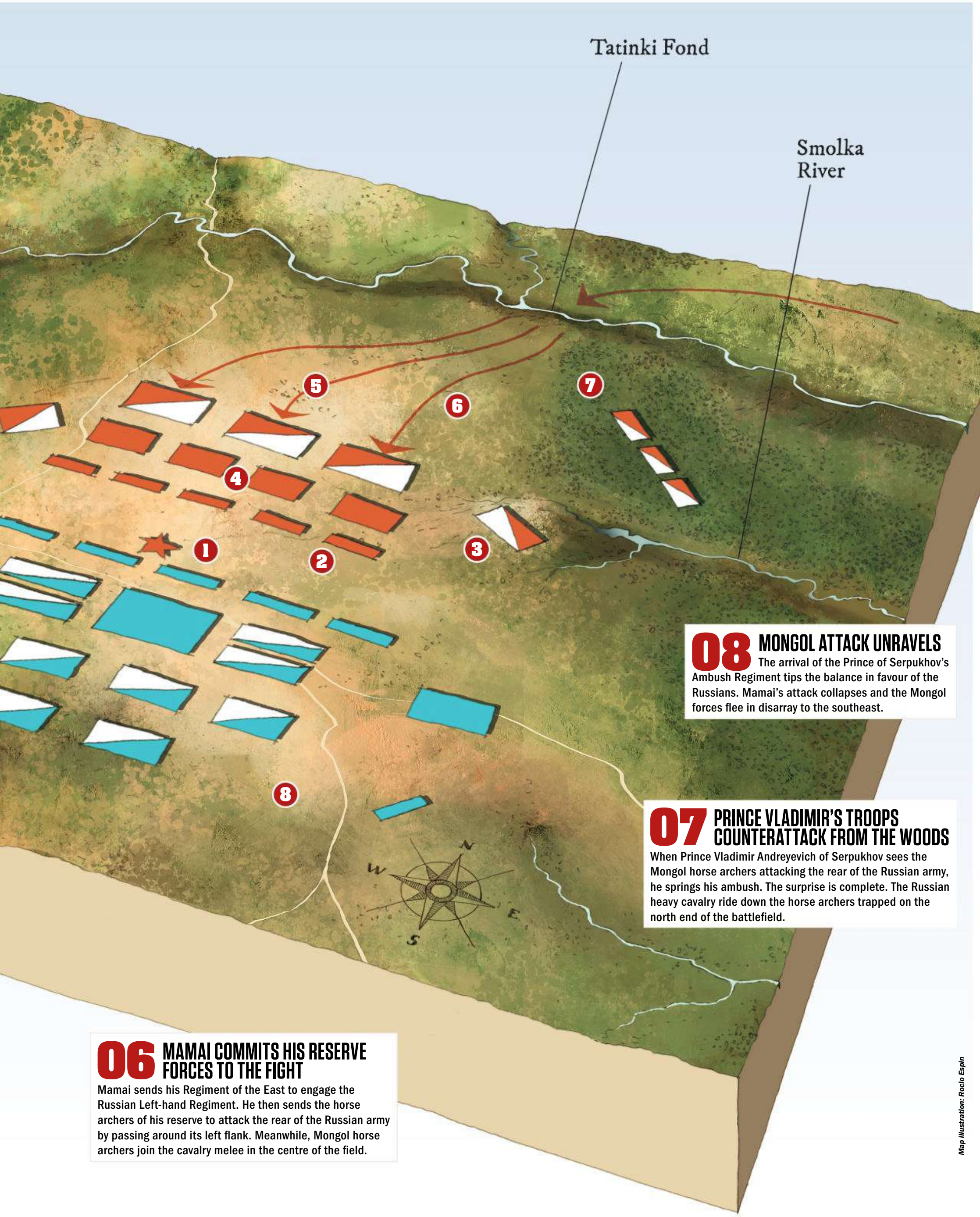
When Prince Ivan II of Moscow died at an early age in 1359, his nine-year-old son Dimitri Ivanovich took the throne as prince of the principalities of both Vladimir and Moscow. Because of his young age, Metropolitan Alexius of Moscow served as his regent and tutor.

When he began to assume a few of his princely duties three years later, one of the first things he did was request that Mamai take the title of grand prince away from Prince Dimitri Konstantinovich of Suzdal and give it to him. Dimitri knew that having the title

*Russian commander Dimitri Ivanovich is shown wearing a conical Circassian helmet with a mail coif similar to those worn by all high-born Russian warriors*

*Image: PD / Wiki / Art*


Nepriadva River
01 MONGOL SCOUTS DISPERSE RUSSIAN MOUNTED SKIRMISHERS
Mongol scouts scatter the Russian mounted skirmishers in front of the Russian main body. The Russian light horsemen peel off to join the wing regiments.
02 MONGOL LANCERS FORCE RUSSIAN INFANTRY TO FALL BACK
The Mongol front line advances to attack the infantry of the Russian advance guard. The lance-wielding Mongol heavy cavalry on both flanks repeatedly charges the Russian foot soldiers, forcing them to give ground.
03 MONGOLS TRY TO TURN RUSSIAN LEFT FLANK
Emir Mamai sends a large body of horse archers into action against the Russian left flank. The Russian left-hand regiment advances to threaten the Mongol horse archers, but does not commit itself to a counterattack for fear of exposing the entire left flank of the Russian army.
04 MONGOL LANCERS KILL BOYAR POSING AS DIMITRI
Mongol horsemen swinging maces and shooting bows seek out and kill Mikhail Brenok, who they believe is Dimitri Ivanovich of Moscow because he is wearing the grand prince's ornate armour and fighting under his banner.
2km
05 RUSSIAN SPEARMEN REFORM BEHIND THEIR CAVALRY
The attack of the Mongol cavalry has disrupted the Russian foot so badly that it must retreat. Dimitri and his captains prevent the surviving foot soldiers from panicking by ordering them to regroup behind the cavalry. The Russian armoured cavalry then engages the Mongol lancers.
Battle of Kulikovo (1380)
Russian army
Mongol army




## 08 MONGOL ATTACK UNRAVELS

The arrival of the Prince of Serpukhov's Ambush Regiment tips the balance in favour of the Russians. Mamai's attack collapses and the Mongol forces flee in disarray to the southeast.

## 07 PRINCE VLADIMIR'S TROOPS COUNTERATTACK FROM THE WOODS

When Prince Vladimir Andreyevich of Serpukhov sees the Mongol horse archers attacking the rear of the Russian army, he springs his ambush. The surprise is complete. The Russian heavy cavalry ride down the horse archers trapped on the north end of the battlefield.

## 06 MAMAI COMMITS HIS RESERVE FORCES TO THE FIGHT

Mamai sends his Regiment of the East to engage the Russian Left-hand Regiment. He then sends the horse archers of his reserve to attack the rear of the Russian army by passing around its left flank. Meanwhile, Mongol horse archers join the cavalry melee in the centre of the field.

*Map illustration: Rocio Espin*

**“ALTHOUGH HE DIED IN A HAIL OF ARROWS, HIS TIMELY COUNTERATTACK BOUGHT DIMITRI PRECIOUS TIME TO MANOEUVRE TROOPS TO HIS THREATENED LEFT FLANK”**

*Grand Prince Dimitri Ivanovich’s army numbered a variety of infantry, including local militiamen, town guards and paid mercenaries*

would ultimately bring him glory, honour and even greater wealth. He eventually secured the coveted title, and as Dimitri matured he revealed himself to be a hard-nosed leader and skilled diplomat.

## Full mobilisation

When Grand Prince Dimitri did not pay his tribute to Mamai in a timely manner in 1378, the Mongol emir dispatched one of his generals, Murza Begich, to conduct a punitive raid on Moscow. Dimitri defeated the raiders at Vozha River 100 miles south of Moscow. Mamai initially overlooked the defeat since Dimitri continued to pay his tribute. But when Mamai significantly increased the rate at which he taxed the principalities of Russia in early 1380, Dimitri lacked the financial resources to pay the higher tax.

When the Muscovites failed to make any appreciable payment after several months, the Mongol emir issued an order in June mobilising the forces of the Blue Horde. Because he expected Dimitri to request the assistance of his fellow Russian princes in defeating the Mongols, Mamai asked Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania for military support. Jogaila was eager to see Moscow humbled because its expansion threatened Lithuanian territory.

Half of Dimitri’s troops came from Muscovite domains and the other half from other Russian principalities. The core of Dimitri’s army was heavy cavalry. In addition to Dimitri’s household troops, the armoured cavalry came from 20 Russian jurisdictions. Rounding out the army were detachments of peasant militia, municipal guards and independent war bands that fought on foot.

Dimitri’s second-in-command was Dimitri Bobrok-Volinsky, who served as the grand prince’s chief of staff. Yet another one of his most trusted subordinate commanders was his 27-year-old cousin Prince Vladimir Andreyevich ‘The Bold’ of Serpukhov.

## Mongol lust for treasure

It took time for the 45-year-old leader of the Blue Horde to assemble his forces. Mamai planned to rendezvous with the Lithuanians at Kulikovo Field. “Let us go to the Russian land and get rich from Russian gold,” Mamai told his troops, anticipating the treasure they might amass in the campaign. The Mongol army arrived at Kulikovo Field on 2 September, and the regiments camped in their battle positions. The core of the Mongol army was its light and heavy Tatar cavalry, but it also included Genoese and Armenian foot soldiers many of whom were, respectively, crossbowmen and archers.

The field was five miles long and nearly three miles wide. It consisted of

*The second-in-command of the Muscovite army at Kulikovo was Grand Prince Dimitri's cousin, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich 'The Bold' of Serpukhov*

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rolling grassland bordered by scattered tracts of forest. Mamai waited patiently for the Lithuanians to appear.

The Russian forces responding to Dimitri's call to arms had assembled in mid-August at Kolomna, a town 70 miles south of Moscow. After allowing additional time for those arriving from far-flung cities and towns to join the Muscovite army, Dimitri led his troops south to the Don River, where they encamped on the north side on 6 September.

## Russian council of war

Dimitri knew that the Lithuanians intended to reinforce Mamai's Mongol army because a Lithuanian-born boyar in the service of Moscow named Semyon Melik had learned of the development through his contacts in Lithuania. The grand prince of Moscow was eager to attack the Mongols before the Lithuanians reinforced them, and he decided to hold a council of war to ensure that he had sufficient support for offensive operations.

At the council of war, held 7 September, Dimitri's captains were divided on the best strategy. Some agreed with Dimitri's proposal to attack immediately, while others wanted him to remain in a defensive position on the north side of the Don. Dimitri believed he had enough support to launch an attack, so he proceeded with his original battle plan.

The Russian sentry regiment followed by the advanced guard regiment under the command of Mikula Velyaminov, the governor of the Muscovite town of Kolomna, splashed through Tatinki Ford that night and secured a foothold for the army on the south bank of the Don. Dimitri anchored the flanks of his army on difficult

*Although perhaps apocryphal, a duel of champions was fought by Russian monk Alexander Peresvet and Golden Horde champion Chelubey minutes before the battle began*

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terrain to thwart the Mongol tactic of having their swift-riding horse archers encircle their foe. He anchored the right flank on deep woods that led to the Nepravda River, and he secured his left flank on the forested headwaters of a narrow river known as the Smolka.

## Call to battle

Unbeknown to Mamai, the Lithuanians were at that moment 25 miles away and approaching the headwaters of the Nepravda. But Mamai would have to fight without them, because Dimitri had his army across the Don and was arraying them for battle on the morning of 8 September.

"By the beginning of the second hour [of daylight], the horns on both sides were getting louder, Mongol and Russian horns were blowing harder," stated *The Tale of the Rout of Mamai*, one of the many Russian chronicles on the battle.

As the fog that covered Kulikovo Field gradually began to dissipate, the warriors of the opposing armies caught their first glimpse of each other. Mamai scanned the enemy host from his command post atop the flat-surfaced Red Hill behind his army's right wing. The emir of the Blue Horde sat atop his mobile throne with black Tug yak-tail banners fluttering around him.

In the late morning a renowned warrior of the Golden Horde, Chelubey, rode forth and shouted a challenge for one of the Russian warriors to fight a duel with him. Although the account may have been apocryphal, such duels were regularly fought before pitched battles in Medieval Europe. Dimitri called for a volunteer, and Russian monk Alexander Peresvet rode forward to represent the Christian host. The two men clashed with lances, and both supposedly suffered terrible wounds and died.

The Russians had adopted the Mongol formation for battle. Both armies organised their troops into five regiments. Each had a sentry regiment, advanced regiment, main regiment, and left-hand and right-hand regiments. In addition, both sides typically had a small reserve. Dimitri decided to establish a concealed ambush unit, rather than a visible reserve. The ambush unit would deploy in a hidden position with orders to strike the enemy during the climax of the battle.

Dimitri formed the Russian army into two lines: spear-wielding infantry stood in the first line, the heavy cavalry deployed behind them in the second line. The second line was much longer than the first because it included the left-hand and right-hand regiments. Dimitri expected the mounted regiments guarding his flanks to prevent Mongol light cavalry from encircling the Russian army.

Dimitri gave command of the ambush regiment to Prince Vladimir Andreyevich and ordered his cousin to hide his troops in an oak forest behind the Smolka River. The grand prince gave his second-in-command, Dimitri Bobrok-Volinsky, the responsibility for determining the opportune time for the regiment to spring the trap.

The Mongol army deployed opposite the Russians in three lines. The first line consisted of Genoese infantry in the middle and heavy cavalry on the wings. The second line, which included the Regiment of the East and Regiment of the West, posted on the flanks and consisted of entirely of light cavalry. The reserve in the third line consisted of Mongol horse archers and a multi-ethnic group of foot soldiers made up of Circassian spearmen and Armenian bowmen.

The Mongol horse archers, who shunned armour because it weighed down their horses,

**"AT THE COST OF ONE-THIRD OF HIS FORCES, DIMITRI HAD DESTROYED MAMAI'S ARMY. ONLY ABOUT 5,000 MONGOLS ESCAPED THE SLAUGHTER"**

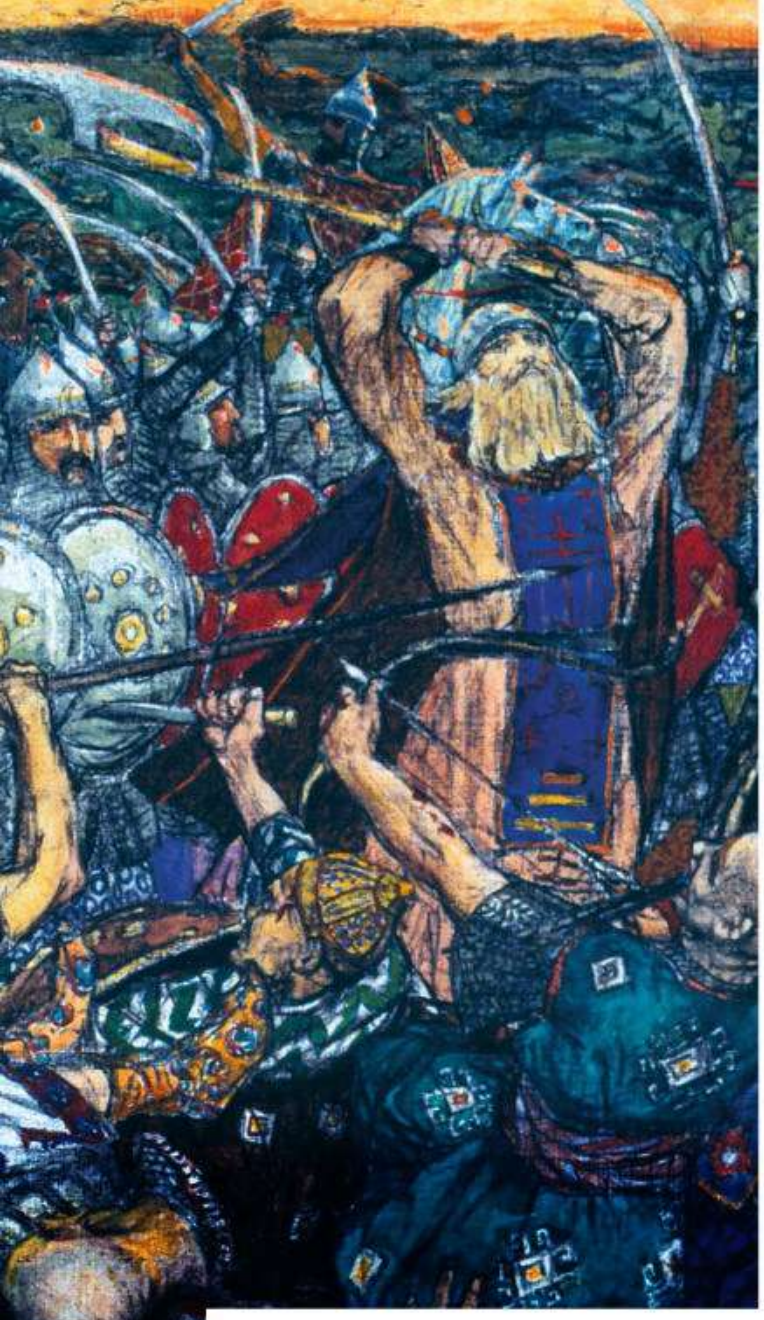
charged and retreated in battle. They rode forward to shoot their arrows, and then withdrew to regroup before advancing again. The Mongol heavy cavalry wore mail or lamellar armour. They fought by charging their enemy with levelled lances, but resorted to their maces after their broke their lances.

Mamai's plan for the battle was to outflank the Russians to the east, but first his troops had to push the Russians north beyond the Smolka River to clear an avenue to the east for his horse archers to get behind the Russians.

## Mongols attack

The Mongol and Genoese infantry in the centre of the Mongol line advanced first with the intention of driving the Russian infantry beyond the headwaters of the Smolka River upon which Dimitri had anchored the Russian left flank. As they advanced, Genoese crossbowmen and Armenian archers loosed their deadly bolts and arrows to soften up the enemy's front rank.

When the longer line of Russian infantry threatened to envelop his foot soldiers, Mamai ordered the heavy cavalry stationed on each wing of the front rank to charge the Russian foot. Russian spearmen dropped to one knee behind their kite shields and angled their spears to ward off the Mongol lancers.



*Russian heavy infantry armed with the moon-bladed berdysh crash into the Mongol front rank*

© Alamy

*Grand Prince Dimitri Ivanovich of Moscow receives the blessing of cleric Sergius of Radonezh before the battle*

Next, Mamai ordered his flank regiments to assail the enemy flanks. Although the Russian right regiment succeeded in checking the advance of the Mongol Regiment of the West, the commander of the Russian left regiment did not engage the Mongol Regiment of the East for fear of exposing the entire Russian left flank. Because of this, the combination of Mongol lancers and horse archers overpowered the Russian foot on the left side and compelled them to retreat behind the Russian cavalry. This first phase of the battle had lasted just 30 minutes.

## Clash of opposing cavalry

After just a few exchanges, the Mongol-Genoese infantry suffered heavy losses. The survivors retreated south; as they did so, Mongol horse archers from the second line rode forward to replace them. Once reinforced, the Mongol cavalry engaged the Russian cavalry, and the two sides became locked in deadly combat. Those mortally or badly wounded who were knocked from their saddles were trampled in the mud and blood.

Dimitri fought with great fury in the middle of the cavalry and suffered several wounds as a result, but his presence boosted the morale of his troops. When it appeared that the Russian left flank was about to give way, 22-year-old Prince Gleb Dmitrievich of Bryansk gathered his retainers about him and launched a headlong charge through a section of the field littered with fallen troops to assail the Mongol right flank. Although he died in a hail of arrows, his timely counterattack bought Dimitri precious time to manoeuvre troops to reinforce his threatened left flank.

By that time the Russian line had pivoted so that it was no longer on an east-west axis. Although its right flank had remained intact, its centre and left had been refused to the point that it was by then on a southwest to northeast axis.

## Mongols commit their reserve

The Mongols had a clear advantage after nearly two hours of fighting; however, the Russians had fought like demons. Mamai had been forced to commit all of his troops, except for his reserve, in order to prevent the Russians from gaining the upper hand. The overwhelming superiority of the Mongol horse archers on the east side of the field vanquished the Russian left-hand regiment and opened up a path to the Russian rear. At that point, Mamai ordered the horse archers in his reserve to cut off the Russians from Tatinki Ford and attack them from behind.

The Mongol reserve reached the rear of the Russian army largely unopposed. When the Mongol horse archers behind the Russian army had fully committed to their attack, Bobrok-Volinsky gave the signal for Andreyevich to attack. Heavily armoured Russian horsemen emerged from the edge of the oak forest and charged the Mongols. “Swords were beating on the helmets of the infidels,” states the *Zadonshchina* chronicle. “The pagans were protecting their bodies with the hands. They then began to retreat.”

The timing of the counterattack was perfect. The Mongol army began to crumble under the weight of the fresh Russian attack. The surviving Mongol horsemen rode past Mamai’s command post without stopping. Mamai and his staff mounted their horses and joined the flight to the east.

At the cost of one-third of his forces, Dimitri had destroyed Mamai’s army. Only about 5,000 Mongols escaped the slaughter. Mamai fled to the Crimean port of Kaffa where he was assassinated, presumably by agents of Tokhtamysh.

## Russian resurgence

The Russians bestowed the honorific of Donskoi, meaning ‘of the Don’, on Grand Prince Dimitri for his decisive victory. The victory at Kulikovo confirmed the outcome of the clash at Vozha River — showing that the Mongols were not invincible.

But the Russians would have to endure another 100 years as vassals of the Khan of the Golden Horde. To reconfirm Mongol overlordship, Tokhtamysh raided and burned Moscow in 1382.

Grand Prince Ivan III of Moscow finally broke the Mongol yoke nearly 100 years later in 1480 at Urgra River when his troops prevented an army of the Golden Horde from attacking Moscow. But this bloodless victory at Battle of Urgra River could in no way match the glory attained by Grand Prince Dimitri and his warriors at Kulikovo Field.

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# SNIPERS OF THE EASTERN FRONT

## Meet the patient sharpshooters who delivered death from afar

*The five-month Battle of Stalingrad was a perfect hunting ground for snipers on both sides*

*Bundesarchiv, Bild 169-0525 / CC-BY-SA 3.0*

WORDS **SCOTT REEVES**

Few fighters spread fear like the sniper. No soldier can let his guard down while the risk remains that an unseen enemy is hiding, waiting for a split-second opportunity. Many a soldier's life has ended without ever hearing the crack of the rifle that killed them.

Snipers proved to be particularly valuable on the Eastern Front in WWII. In the early months of Operation Barbarossa, the Red Army was fighting a desperate defensive action, and a single well-placed sniper could pin down dozens of invaders. The Germans thought the best way to eliminate this threat was with their own marksmen. The best snipers quickly became propagandised heroes – feted by their own side, hated by the enemy.

Marksmen on both sides searched for high-value targets through their scopes. To take out a commanding officer could incapacitate a whole unit, leaving it leaderless and confused. Snipers also knew the value of fear. A bullet to the stomach usually led to a slow, agonising death for the victim, but it also devastated morale among their comrades.

Thousands of soldiers on the Eastern Front were given a rifle, scope and orders to kill. Some lasted only days before they faced their own death, but a select few were responsible for the deaths of hundreds.

# MATTHÄUS HETZENAUER

## ALLEGIANCE: Nazi Germany
## LENGTH OF SERVICE: 1943-45
## KILLS: 345

Born in a small village in the Austrian Alps, Matthäus Hetzenauer learned his deadly trade hunting deer in the hills. Officers identified his excellent marksmanship after he was drafted into the Wehrmacht at the age of 17, and he was quickly transferred to sniper school.

Hetzenauer was unleashed in the Carpathians in August 1944 with orders to protect mountain artillery units from the advancing Red Army. Almost every day the Germans came under attack from Soviet guns. Hetzenauer slipped away from the lines to find a position from which he could take out any officers who were unfortunate enough to draw his attention. During one Soviet assault, Hetzenauer shot dead eight different company commanders, throwing the attack into confusion.

Hetzenauer stayed in position throughout the daylight hours, looking to take particular advantage at dawn and dusk when enemy soldiers were more careless and vulnerable to his marksmanship. During ten months at the front, Hetzenauer made 345 confirmed kills – more than one a day. He was also on the receiving end, suffering a head wound during an artillery barrage. Only capture by the Red Army in May 1945 brought the most prolific Axis sniper's reign of terror to an end.

Image: Wiki / PD / Jaroslav Alexandr Dvorák

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

# LYUDMILA PAVLICHENKO

## ALLEGIANCE: Soviet Union LENGTH OF SERVICE: 1941-53
## KILLS: 309

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Lyudmila Pavlichenko rushed to join up. She rejected the recruiting officer's suggestion that she become a nurse and insisted that she become a sniper due to her childhood years on the shooting range.

Any hesitation that Pavlichenko might have had in taking another life evaporated when a fellow soldier was shot as he hid in her sniper's nest at the Siege of Odessa. "After that, nothing could stop me," Pavlichenko later wrote. She got the first of her kills later that day when she shot two German scouts. During the next two months Pavlichenko claimed more than 100 other victims. After Axis troops overran Odessa, she was withdrawn and sent to a second city under siege: Sevastopol.

The Germans feared the enemy they named Lady Death. Wehrmacht snipers were despatched to take her out, but Pavlichenko was successful in 36 tense duels. Some lasted for days until her opponent made a false move. Pavlichenko was pulled from the front line after being hit by shrapnel, but the Germans still wanted revenge. They broadcast messages over loudspeakers threatening to tear her into 309 pieces after they captured the city. "They even know my score!" the delighted sniper exclaimed.

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# VASILY ZAITSEV

## ALLEGIANCE: Soviet Union
## LENGTH OF SERVICE: 1937-45
## KILLS: 225

When Germany invaded, Vasily Zaitsev was serving as a clerk in the Pacific Fleet on the far side of Russia. He requested a frontline posting and arrived in time for the Battle of Stalingrad. It was a move that paid off handsomely: Zaitsev killed 32 enemy soldiers with a standard-issue rifle, and his kill-count increased rapidly after he was given a sniper rifle and optical sight.

He excelled amid the burned-out buildings of Stalingrad. In two bloody months he killed 225 enemy soldiers from concealed positions. As his reputation grew, Zaitsev was given command of multiple snipers and ordered to defend several open areas. He developed a strategy in which three snipers worked together from three different positions, each supported by an observer.

Posthumous Hollywood fame came in 2001 with the release of *Enemy at the Gates*, a film based on a sniper duel between Zaitsev and the head of a German sniper school brought to Stalingrad to eliminate the Soviet marksman. Whether this duel actually took place is debated by historians, although Zaitsev is credited with killing 11 German snipers. A mortar attack damaged his eyesight, but the Hero of the Soviet Union recovered sufficiently to return to the front line in 1945.

**"IN TWO BLOODY MONTHS HE KILLED 225 ENEMY SOLDIERS"**

# IVAN SIDORENKO

## ALLEGIANCE: Soviet Union
## LENGTH OF SERVICE: 1939-45 KILLS: 500

Hitler wasn't the only art school dropout of World War II. Sidorenko left his studies at Penza Art College in 1939 to enlist in the Red Army. By 1941 he was sneaking away from his artillery unit to kill Germans as a self-taught sniper. Sidorenko's voluntary missions soon caught the eye of his superiors, and he was tasked with passing on his expertise to others, eventually teaching more than 250 recruits on the Baltic Front. He even allowed novice snipers to shadow him on the front line – on-the-job training had never been so dangerous.

Snipers didn't just target people. When Sidorenko spotted a German motor convoy during the Battle of Moscow, he quickly loaded his rifle with incendiary bullets. After a few precise shots the Germans fled, minus a destroyed tank and three tractors. One man had single-handedly sent dozens of Wehrmacht soldiers scurrying for their lives.

In three years Sidorenko reportedly killed 500 enemy combatants, making him the Soviet Union's deadliest sniper. His tally only stopped rising after a wound suffered in Estonia left him hospitalised and his superiors decided that Sidorenko's value as a teacher was greater than his kills on the front line.

Image: Wiki / PD / Fair use

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# FYODOR OKHLOPKOV

**ALLEGIANCE:** Soviet Union **LENGTH OF SERVICE:** 1941-45
**KILLS:** 429

An ethnic Yakut born in the eastern USSR and orphaned at the age of five, Fyodor Okhlopkov eventually escaped the poverty of his home village when he was conscripted into the army in 1941 and became a machine-gunner. He was identified as a potential sniper in late 1942 when his unit was rebuilt following a bloody month in which 80 per cent were killed or wounded.

Perhaps more than any other sniper, Okhlopkov demonstrated a range of skills. Aside from sniping, he continued to take shifts in the machine-gun nests and also wielded an anti-tank rifle.

Whereas many snipers were kept away from danger once their kill count and propaganda value rose, Okhlopkov was allowed to go on hazardous reconnaissance patrols behind enemy lines. He was wounded 12 times, the final injury being a chest wound that kept him out of action for nine months.

Despite being credited with 429 kills with his sniper rifle – never mind many more with a machine gun – Okhlopkov's recommendation for the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was downgraded to the Order of the Red Banner. Only on the 20th anniversary of Victory Day was he finally granted the title routinely given to snipers from the western republics.

# JOSEF ALLERBERGER

**ALLEGIANCE:** Nazi Germany
**LENGTH OF SERVICE:** 1942-45
**KILLS:** 257

A compatriot of Matthäus Hetzenauer in the 3rd Mountain Division, Allerberger discovered he had a sniper's eye while experimenting with a captured Soviet rifle. His first kill came when he took out a Soviet sniper who was pinning down German troops. Allerberger patiently identified his position by showing a dummy target, then settled down to shoot from between two tree stumps. When German observers rushed out to confirm the kill, they discovered that Allerberger had shot his opponent through his right eye.

The 19-year-old self-taught sniper made 23 confirmed kills before being sent for formal training. Upon his return to the Eastern Front, Allerberger proved himself on more than one occasion. In one encounter at Balakovo, he despatched 18 female snipers who were shooting at German positions from vantage points in trees. Allerberger identified their positions by spotting which tree branches shook and cleared them within an hour.

Allerberger also stopped an attack headed by three T-34 tanks when the officer commanding the lead tank made the mistake of lifting his hatch a few inches and peeking out. Allerberger shot him dead. The tanks quickly turned and retreated, taking with them another victim of the Third Reich's second-deadliest sniper.

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## "DUNN FENDED OFF THE ENEMY BLADES, DRAWING THE FULL FURY OF THEIR ATTENTION AGAINST HIM, ALLOWING TIME FOR BENTLEY TO GET TO HIS FEET"

**Sergeant-Major Lloyd Smith**

*Dunn was a natural equestrian, skilled marksman and lethal with a sword. He cultivated a disciplinarian image but was respected by his men*

© Alamy

# ALEXANDER ROBERTS DUNN

On a cold October morning in 1854, as the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade crumbled near Balaklava, this dashing cavalryman saved two of his comrades to become Canada's first Victoria Cross recipient

WORDS **ALEX BOWERS**

The trumpet call rang out across the Valley of Death, its shrill and ominous sound an order to advance towards the enemy. Horses lurched forward, hastened by the roughly 670 mounted men of the Light Brigade, as a cloud of frosted breath filled the air.

Alexander Roberts Dunn, a Canadian lieutenant with the 11th Hussars made up part of the second line of attack. His oversized sword scabbard brushed against his thigh with every stride of his mount, as he followed the first ranks of cavalrymen in their advance across the open ground. He glanced at his comrades around him — all wore the same forlorn expression, the faces of those who knew they were almost certainly embarking on a suicide mission. A terrible mistake had been made, one that would ring through the annals of history like the trumpeter's haunting notes to charge. But for Dunn, at least, the events that were about to unfold, specifically the actions he was about to take, would shed a beacon of light on one of the darkest days for the British Army.

It had been a day that started with news that the Russians, hoping to disrupt Allied preparations and relieve pressure on the Siege of Sevastopol, had advanced towards the British base at Balaklava. Under General Pavel Liprandi, the enemy force numbered 25,000 infantry, 34 squadrons of cavalry and 78 guns. They had subsequently overrun the Turkish positions on a low ridge of hills called the Causeway Heights, taking Allied cannons and advancing into the South Valley before being repulsed by the 93rd Highland Regiment (dubbed the 'Thin Red Line'). An 800-strong charge of the British Heavy Brigade had followed, pushing the Russians back into the North Valley. However, the Allies' luck ended there: not long after, Liprandi's men cemented their footing on the Causeway Heights,

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bolstered its captured artillery redoubts, and set up their own redoubts on the opposite side of the North Valley atop the Fedioukine Hills. They then further established themselves at the eastern end of the valley with a dozen-gun battery, effectively sealing it off with a U-shaped wall of firepower.

British Field Marshal Lord Raglan, a rusty 65-year-old veteran who hadn't fought since Waterloo some 40 years earlier, had watched the bloody skirmishes unfold from a lookout on the Sapouné Ridge, approximately 200 metres above the plain. Increasingly concerned that the Russians were removing the seized artillery, he had issued his notoriously ambiguous order to the commander of the Cavalry Division: "The cavalry [will] advance rapidly to the front, follow the enemy, and try to prevent the enemy from carrying away the guns." Raglan's aide-de-camp, the hot-headed Captain Lewis Nolan, had been tasked with carrying the message to Lieutenant-General Lucan in the west end of the North Valley, which was received with puzzlement. Lucan, his camp situated on the low ground, could see only the 12 Russian guns directed at his men and protected by several squadrons of enemy cavalry on the other side of the valley;

***This iconic painting by John Charlton depicts the close-quarters fighting as the British charged the Russian guns during the Battle of Balaklava***

those atop of the Causeway Heights, which Raglan intended him to engage, were out of his field of vision. With few clear instructions provided by Nolan, who reportedly pointed vaguely in the direction of the artillery ahead, it was thus that the fateful decision was taken for the Light Brigade to advance on the heavily defended positions immediately in front.

As the men advanced the Russian guns opened fire, leaving in their wake a scattering of mangled corpses as the surviving horses pushed on. Wounded soldiers were trampled underfoot in the desperate struggle that ensued, and all the while the cannons tore into the ranks from three sides. Dunn, his towering frame of 190cm making for a fearsome sight in the saddle, his blond walrus-like moustache catching the wind while he rode, wielded his custom-made 1.2-metre sabre (much longer than regulation length to accommodate his size) at the ready. He and the other 80 mounted members of the 11th Hussars, along with the other units involved in the charge, were filled with rage. Finally, after ten minutes of charging into the point-blank bombardment, the Light Brigade reached the enemy. British swords were free to hack at the Russian artillerymen and all who stood in their path. In the ensuing melee the defenders were pushed as far back as the Chernaya River, but without Allied infantry support it soon became apparent that the Light Brigade needed to retreat. Except now a contingent of Russian cavalry was there to challenge the withdrawal.

Dunn and what was left of his regiment gathered and made one final dash to break free of the enemy spears. Admired as a natural equestrian, the 21-year-old Canadian escaped unscathed, though several stragglers behind him were quickly encircled. Among them was Sergeant Robert Bentley, who was knocked from his saddle by three Russian dragoons. Dunn could have turned a blind eye, but instead he turned his horse and dug in his spurs. Another cavalryman, Sergeant-Major Lloyd Smith, saw what happened next: "Dunn fended off the enemy blades, drawing the full fury of their attention against him, allowing time for Bentley to get to his feet. Employing his huge sword, Lieutenant Dunn parried and slashed with effortless strength, and cut down the first dragoon out of his saddle. Although Dunn's horse became almost unmanageable, he and the remaining Russians hacked and circled around until he killed them both." Having saved one comrade, Dunn went on to rescue another of his men, Private Levett, who was also being attacked by a Russian. Dunn's swordsmanship, like his riding skills, was renowned, and the enemy was promptly dispatched. Levett was nevertheless killed minutes later.

**"HAVING IN THE LIGHT CAVALRY CHARGE ON THE 25TH OCTOBER, 1854, SAVED THE LIFE OF SERGEANT BENTLEY... BY CUTTING DOWN TWO OR THREE RUSSIAN[S]... AND AFTERWARDS CUTTING DOWN A RUSSIAN HUSSAR... ATTACKING PRIVATE LEVETT"**

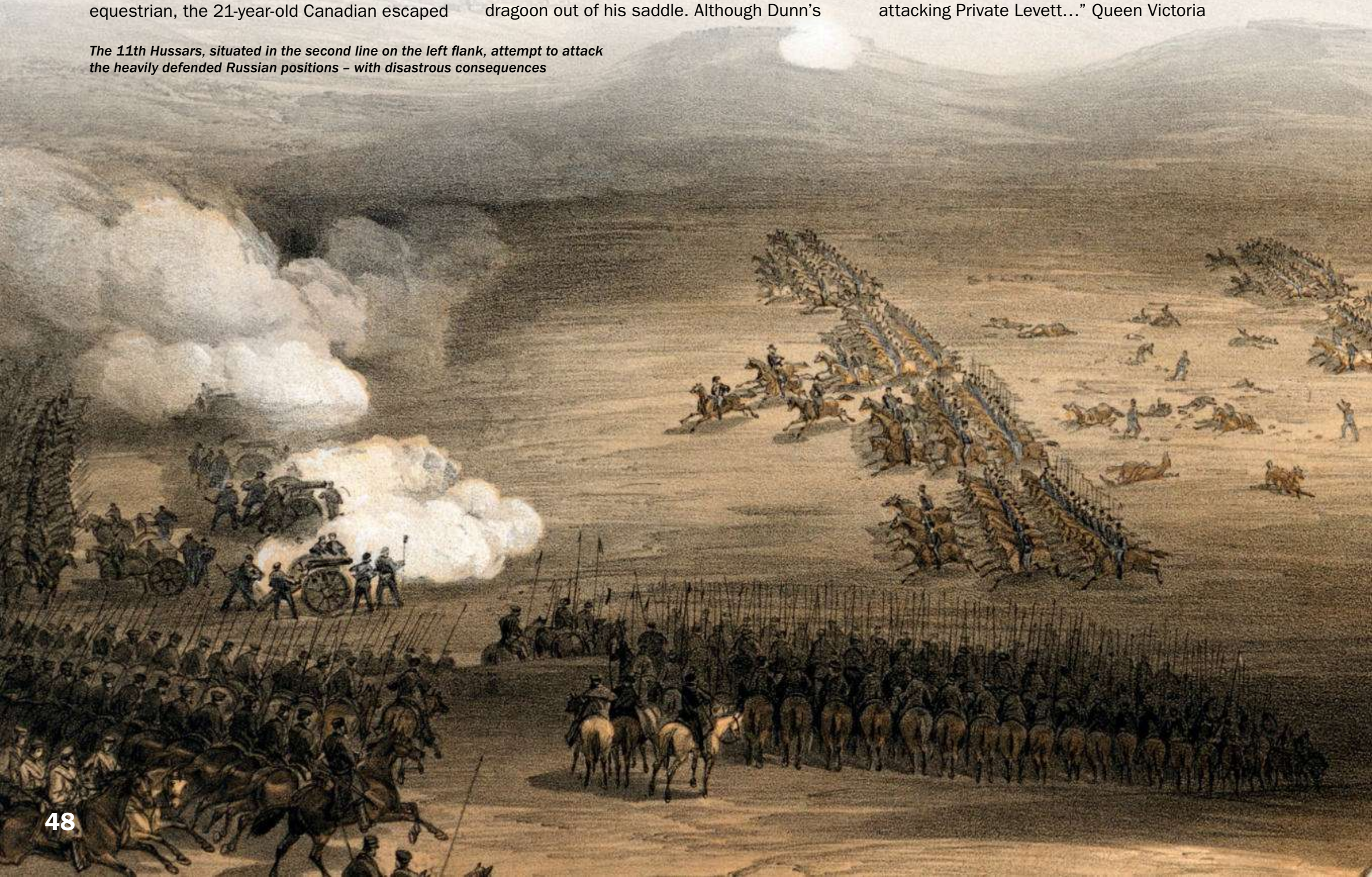
**Alexander Dunn's VC citation**

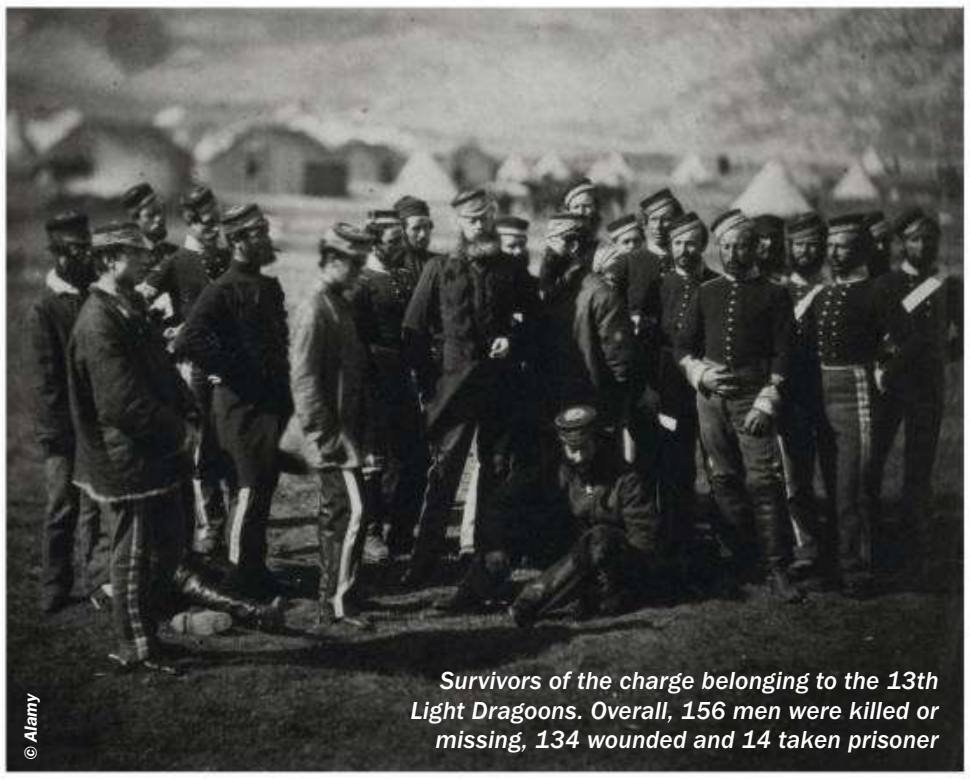
Yet no one could deny that Dunn had showcased exceptional valour in a moment of extreme peril. While the Charge of the Light Brigade had led to 156 men killed or missing, 134 wounded and 14 taken prisoner (as well as a death toll of 475 out of 670 horses), there was at least one less casualty due to Dunn's skill and bravery. Many of the 25 survivors of the 11th Hussars had witnessed his heroics, and voted unanimously that he should receive a gallantry award.

It would take some years for such a medal to be pinned to his left breast pocket, during which time Dunn served in the Siege of Sevastopol and the Battle of Inkerman before running away with none other than his commander's wife. He resigned his army commission and eloped with his lover to Canada, where they lived together on his family estate in York (present-day Toronto). Then, in 1857, Dunn received word that he along with 62 other soldiers had been selected as one of the first veterans to receive the newly created Victoria Cross.

His citation recognised his "…having in the Light Cavalry charge on the 25th October, 1854, saved the life of Sergeant Bentley… by cutting down two or three Russian[s]… and afterwards cutting down a Russian Hussar… attacking Private Levett…" Queen Victoria

*The 11th Hussars, situated in the second line on the left flank, attempt to attack the heavily defended Russian positions – with disastrous consequences*





*Survivors of the charge belonging to the 13th Light Dragoons. Overall, 156 men were killed or missing, 134 wounded and 14 taken prisoner*

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*A Canadian peacekeeping force was stationed in the Eritrean town of Senafe (pictured) in the early 2000s and found Alexander Roberts Dunn's gravesite there*

© Getty

herself presided over the illustrious ceremony in London's Hyde Park, placing the decoration – cast in bronze from a Russian cannon – on his royal blue hussar jacket. Prior to returning to Canada, he was successfully persuaded to re-join the army as a major, whereby he helped raise the 100th Regiment (Prince of Wales's Royal Canadian).

In 1864, Dunn was promoted again and became the first Canadian to command a regiment and the youngest colonel in the British Army. However, his insatiable hunger for adventure would, in time, be his downfall after transferring to the 33rd Regiment (The Duke of Wellington's Own) and participating in the British Expedition to Abyssinia, where he met his mysterious demise.

The military coroner's official account is that during a hunting expedition Dunn was sitting on a rock, attempting to uncork a brandy flask, when his rifle slipped and discharged into his chest. Others speculated that foul play was involved. Dunn was a notorious womaniser and one theory is that someone in his unit, perhaps a jealous husband, exacted revenge upon him. Another suggestion is that Dunn's former mistress, having been written out of his will, hired his valet as an assassin. Finally, there is the possibility that 'survivor's guilt' following the Charge of the Light Brigade drove him to suicide. Regardless of the truth, he was buried in present-day Eritrea and largely forgotten about until the end of the Second World War, when a British soldier discovered his grave. It turned out that occupying Italian forces, despite being on opposing sides to the British, had taken it upon themselves to clean and tend to Dunn's final resting place. Unfortunately, though, his grave was again forgotten about and neglected for half a century until a Canadian peacekeeping mission discovered it and once more restored it to its former glory. In Canada itself, meanwhile, several memorials have been erected in Dunn's honour.

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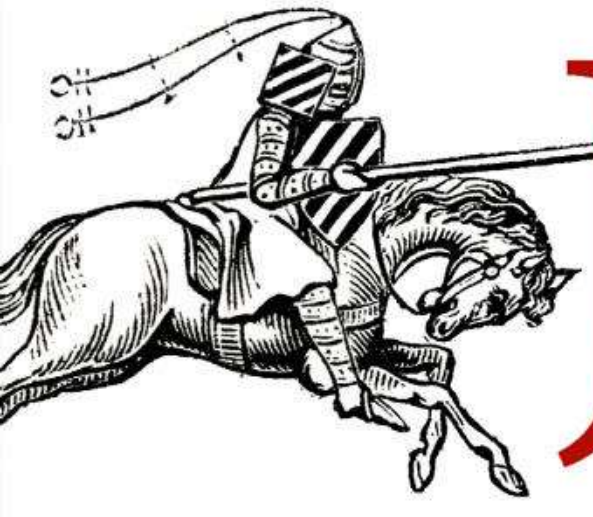
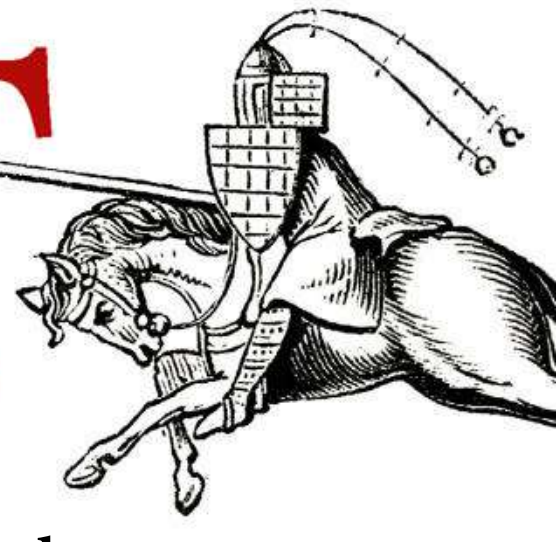
# ORIGINS OF THE JOUST





WORDS CHRIS GRAVETT

**The must-see martial spectacle of the medieval world was a mix of knightly tradition, combat skills and daring**

As far back as military history goes, warriors have practised for war. However, in the late 11th century a new kind of event emerged in north-west France that combined training with spectacle — the tournament. This event saw hundreds of knights fight in two teams in open countryside, often supported by foot soldiers. The name 'tournament' was first mentioned in 1114 and derives from the turning or wheeling manoeuvres involved. The aim was to capture opposing knights for ransom, providing money as well as good training.

Individual combats with lances were called jousts, probably from the Latin 'juxtare', 'to meet together' and Middle French 'joster', 'to encounter'. During this period they sometimes took place before the main battle, reflecting the real-life practice of champions from opposing armies challenging each other. The earliest reference to it is in the preliminary jousting before a tournament at Tournai in 1095 when Count Henry of Brabant was killed. Their popularity grew during the first half of the 13th century, partly because of royal bans on the team tournaments, firstly in England and then in France. Initially jousts were often part of 'Round Tables', gatherings alluding to King Arthur. Historian Maurice Keen stated that it may also owe "much to the numerous descriptions in literature of judicial duels (usually between a hero and a villain)".

Jousting also allowed knights to show off their skills in front of spectators and other jousters without being attacked by other participants. Jousts included more parading and pageantry, and the growing influence of chivalry was reflected in the role of ladies: jousters sometimes carried their token, or 'favour'. The German Ulrich von Liechtenstein supposedly rode on his jousting tour of the Holy Roman Empire in 1226 dressed as Lady Venus.

Lances were commonly made of ash wood, although Geoffrey Chaucer mentions cedar wood. Two Tudor lances in the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds are made from pine and probably fir. The lance was about four metres long and during the 14th century was increasingly furnished with a circular steel vamplate to protect the hand and a ring around the shaft behind, which tucked into the armpit to prevent the lance slipping backwards on striking the opponent. From the 15th century onwards this ring developed into the graper, a crown of small spikes that bit into a wooden core held in a 'lance rest' on the steel breastplates of armour. For jousts of war (à outrance), a sharp steel head was used to demonstrate courage and skill; for jousts of peace (à pleasance), which emerged in the 13th century, either a blunted head was used or a steel coronel of small prongs that spread the force of the blow.

***Left: A German knight is unhorsed as ladies watch from stands, from the early 14th century Manesse Codex***

**"TWICE, IN 1524 AND 1536, HENRY VIII'S LOVE OF JOUSTING BROUGHT HIM WITHIN INCHES OF DEATH – EVEN FOR KINGS IT WAS A DANGEROUS SPORT"**

In the 15th century lances lengthened to about 4.3 metres and were thickest directly in front of and behind the hand and tapered at both ends. By the Tudor period jousting lances had generally shortened and were fluted on the outside. They were sometimes hollow inside or jointed so they would shatter more easily.

## An extreme sport

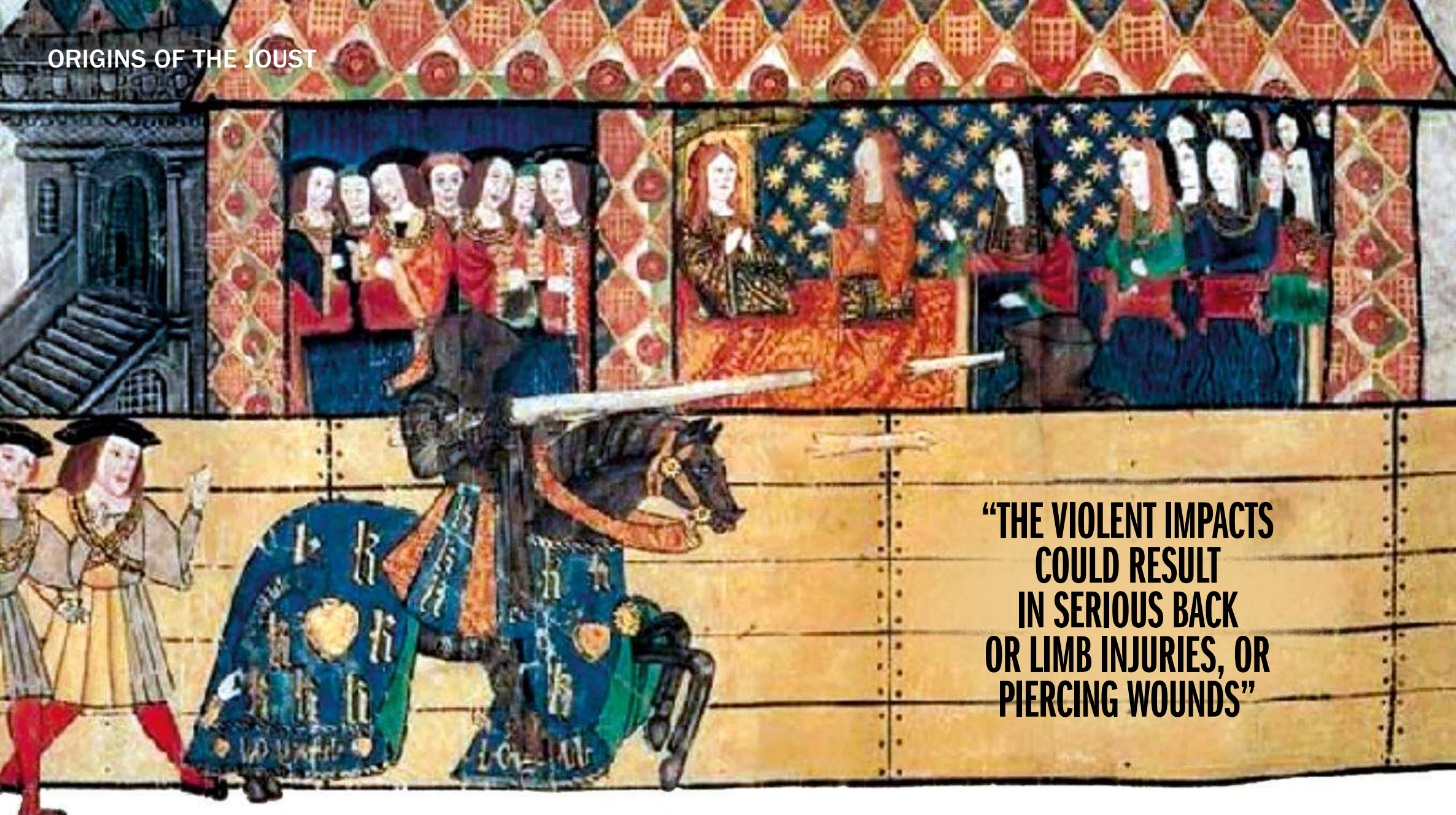
Many jousts were run to show off skill and win contests. Despite blunted weapons increasingly being used, accidents happened: in 1252 at Walden, England, a knight was killed when a sharp lance was used by mistake. Some jousting fatalities were the result of suspected foul play, in other contests tempers simply boiled over. Jousts with sharp lances were obviously more dangerous: in 1438 in Paris John Astley ran Piers de Massy through the head with his lance, killing him. Such lethal jousts were favoured during truces, such as between England and Scotland or France. In the 14th and 15th centuries challenges to duels with sharp weapons were sent out during peacetime, often to fulfil a vow: Lord Scales had a gold chain with a forget-me-not tied round his leg by several English ladies as sign of his vow.

It's easy to confuse jousting to win renown with the judicial duel, which was a combat fought in the presence of the church to settle a dispute between two persons. It was believed that God would give victory to the man who was in the right. For those of rank it was fought in full armour on horseback and it continued until one of the combatants yielded or was killed.

Adding to the danger in jousting was the 80-90kph combined closing speed of the two horses. A central dividing barrier – or tilt – isn't mentioned until 1429 and even after that some contests were still run 'in the open field'; colliding, or damaging your knees from passing too closely, was a real danger. A spectator at Le Hem in France in 1278 recounted how two jousters rode "so close that they crashed together, chest to chest, both man and horse".

From the 14th century special armour pieces began to appear, the first being the helm, which is often described as 'frog-mouthed'. The lower edge of the eye slit jutted forward like the prow of a ship to deflect a lance and help protect against splinters if the lance shattered. Once solid breast and back plates began to be worn during the later 14th century, the helm could be strapped or stapled down to prevent it being snapped back from the impact of a lance. Later helms had a web of adjustable laces and straps inside attached to a padded hood to hold and cushion the head. The jousting shield could be laced to the breastplate, and a large gauntlet called the manifer protected the left hand. From the 15th century onwards jousting armour became thicker and heavier, and some had extra pieces called 'reinforces' for the left side: reinforces for the elbow (pasguard) and shoulder and throat (grandguard) meant the shield could be left off. Manifer, pasguard and grandguard overlapped upwards so as not to catch a lance point. Henry VIII's 1540 armour even had a spare set in case of damage.

Despite all these safeguards jousting could still be lethal, as Henry found out. "Twice, in 1524 and 1536, his love of jousting brought him within inches of death – even for kings it was a dangerous sport," explains armour



**“THE VIOLENT IMPACTS COULD RESULT IN SERIOUS BACK OR LIMB INJURIES, OR PIERCING WOUNDS”**

*Henry VIII jousting in front of Katherine of Aragon, his horse coverings decorated with the letter ‘K’ and hearts for ‘Coeur Loyall’, meaning ‘Loyal Heart’. (From the Westminster Tournament Roll, 1511)*

expert Thom Richardson. Henry II of France died in 1559 when a splinter from a shattered lance pierced his helm’s eye slit; and Charles IX was seriously injured in 1561 in an incident that largely contributed to the decline of jousting in France.

The violent impacts could result in serious back or limb injuries, or piercing wounds. And despite the thickly sanded floor of the jousting arena the risk of serious injury from a fall was ever-present. Historian Sydney Anglo describes how, in around 1434, King Duarte of Portugal advised that, even in training, progress “from light to heavy lance must be gradual to avoid the risk of rupture, back-ache, headache, or pains in the legs and hands”.

## Rules of the joust

The Statute of Arms (1292) shows that some rules were in place in England in an attempt to reduce unruly behaviour at tournaments, especially from squires and spectators. But historians Richard Barber and Juliet Barker assert that actual rules only survive from the 15th century onwards “and it is all too easy for these to influence our view of what went on in earlier tournaments.” Several runs would be agreed, perhaps followed by sword combat on foot. During the 15th century we see lavish spectacles such as the pas d’armes, in which several knights held a piece of ground against all-comers. Detailed challenges could be sent out sometimes as much as a year ahead. The various agreed combats might be represented by the defendants’ coloured shields, with a challenger selecting one by tapping it. Many different types of joust arose in different countries, with or without a barrier.

Heralds recorded the scores, with unhorsing an opponent winning the most points. Striking coronel to coronel was difficult, and striking the helmet crest noteworthy; breaking your lance cleanly on your opponent also earned points. But Angelo points out that “hitting the head or neck of the opponent’s horse, his saddle-bow, bridle hand, thigh or any place below it” was forbidden. Historian Claude Gaier says surviving scoresheets, called cheques, show just how hard it was to land a blow: “Statistics derived from these figures show that 50 to 65 percent of the lance courses run did not score a hit on either side.” There were also rules on who could take part. “Lack of hereditary qualification, or marriage below one’s estate, were the commonest ‘reproaches’ against would-be jousters,” explained Keen.

*Sir John Astley and his opponent break their lances in a shower of splinters. Note the frog-mouthed helms, no leg armour because of the high barrier, and coronels on the lance tips. (From a late 15th century manuscript)*

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## Demise and modern revival

Jousting continued into the 16th century as an elaborate spectacle. Henry VIII was a lifelong fan and in Germany, Emperor Maximilian invented many runs, including some to heighten excitement as safety increased, such as shields on springs that burst into fragments when struck by a lance.

The elaborate pas d’armes and specialised armour increasingly separated jousting from real combat, yet great jousters were often adept at both. However, by the end of the 16th century warfare was changing. Lances were ineffective against bodies of infantry armed with pikes and backed up by musketeers, and this was reflected in the tournament contest where groups of men fought with pikes over a barrier in the foot tourney. Some jousts continued into the early 17th century but were replaced by the carrousel, which emphasised horsemanship and display.

The disappearance of armour from the battlefield in the late 17th century made jousting hugely expensive and less common, although in 1778 a tournament was held by Lord Cathcart in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Tilting at the quintain (a dummy) or a dummy head and spearing a hanging ring survived into the 19th century (the latter is still Maryland’s ‘official state sport’). The 19th-century medieval revival saw the Eglinton Tournament in Ayrshire, Scotland, in 1839, although the British weather nearly ruined the proceedings.

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# FERRET

The Ferret is an agile, quiet, low-profile armoured scout car designed for reconnaissance and liaison work on the battlefield

WORDS **CRAIG MOORE**

### THE MK.2 TURRET

The manually operated turret has a 360-degree traverse. The single-piece roof hatch can be locked in three positions and the rear part of the turret can be locked down to form a seat. The commander can use a No.3 Mk.1 sight periscope to aim the turret-mounted machine gun, which has an elevation of -15 to +70 degrees.

### ANTI-MINE DESIGN

The Ferret is divided into three compartments: the driving section, the fighting compartment, and the engine is at the rear. It has the classic boat shape at the front but the lower hull incorporates sloping sides to help deflect mine blasts.

### ARMOUR PROTECTION

The Ferret's armour thickness ranges from 6-16mm, which is enough to protect the crew from small-arms fire and shell splinters. The Mk.1 was open-topped and this exposed the crew to injury from airburst artillery rounds and snipers.

The FV701 Ferret scout car was in front-line British Army service from 1952 until 1995 and continues to see service in some African, Middle East and Far East armies. In 1947 the War Office issued specifications for a new armoured scout car it planned to order; it was to initially supplement then later replace the successful World War Two Daimler Dingo armoured car. In October 1948 the Daimler Motorcar Company Ltd was awarded the development contract. The prototype was initially called the 'Fieldmouse' but was later renamed after the more aggressive ferret.

© Getty

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## FERRET MK.1

| | |
|---|---|
| COMMISSIONED: | 1948 |
| ORIGIN: | UNITED KINGDOM |
| LENGTH: | 3.7M (12FT 2IN) |
| RANGE: | 305KM (190 MILES) |
| ENGINE: | ROLLS-ROYCE B60 MK.6A 4.25 LITRE STRAIGHT-SIX 120HP PETROL ENGINE |
| CREW: | 2-3 MEN: COMMANDER AND DRIVER (PLUS MACHINE GUNNER) |
| PRIMARY WEAPON: | .30 CAL M1919 BROWNING MACHINE GUN, OR BREN GUN, OR 7.62MM GPMG |
| SECONDARY WEAPON: | SIX FORWARD-FIRING 66MM GRENADE LAUNCHERS |

***Left:** A British Army Ferret scout car out on patrol near Aden, Yemen*

*Illustration: Nic Forder*

It was built as a very agile 4x4 reconnaissance and liaison vehicle that could ford up to 0.9 metres (3ft) of water without preparation. Its low profile made it inconspicuous and its weapons were for self-defence, not attack. When contact was made with the enemy the commander would radio that location to headquarters and the vehicle would retreat. All the forward gears of its preselector five-speed epicyclic gearbox were also available in reverse to help the crew get out of trouble fast. A total of 4,409 Ferrets were manufactured between 1952 and 1962.

### OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The Ferret's average safe cross-country speed was 40.2km/h (25mph) and its maximum climbable gradient was 24°. Fuel consumption on the road was good, compared to a tank, at 3km/l (9mpg). It had an operational road range of 306km (190 miles).

# ARMAMENT

The Ferret could be armed with a .30 cal. MG M1919A4 Browning machine gun; a .30 cal Bren light machine gun or one that had been re-barrelled to accept the 7.62x51mm NATO round; or a 7.62x51mm general-purpose machine gun (GPMG). Some gun mounts had a box for collecting hot spent cartridges. Machine guns fitted to Mk.2 Ferrets were mounted in an enclosed turret. Six forward-firing 66mm grenade launchers were fitted to the hull in front of the driver above the front wheels, three on each side. These normally carried smoke grenades.

***Top:** Two pairs of three forward-firing 66mm grenade launchers were fitted to the hull. They normally carried smoke grenades*

***Left:** The Mk.1 Ferret commander could operate the Bren machine gun in a forward-facing gun mount*

***Above, top:** The .30 cal Bren light machine gun could be stowed behind the commander on the Ferret Mk.1*

***Above:** Vigilant anti-tank missiles are mounted on a Ferret on display at The Tank Museum in Dorset*

All images © Kevin Browne unless otherwise stated

*The Ferret Mk.1/2 had a fixed tower and a large hatch to give added protection. The Mk.2 had a turret*

## DESIGN

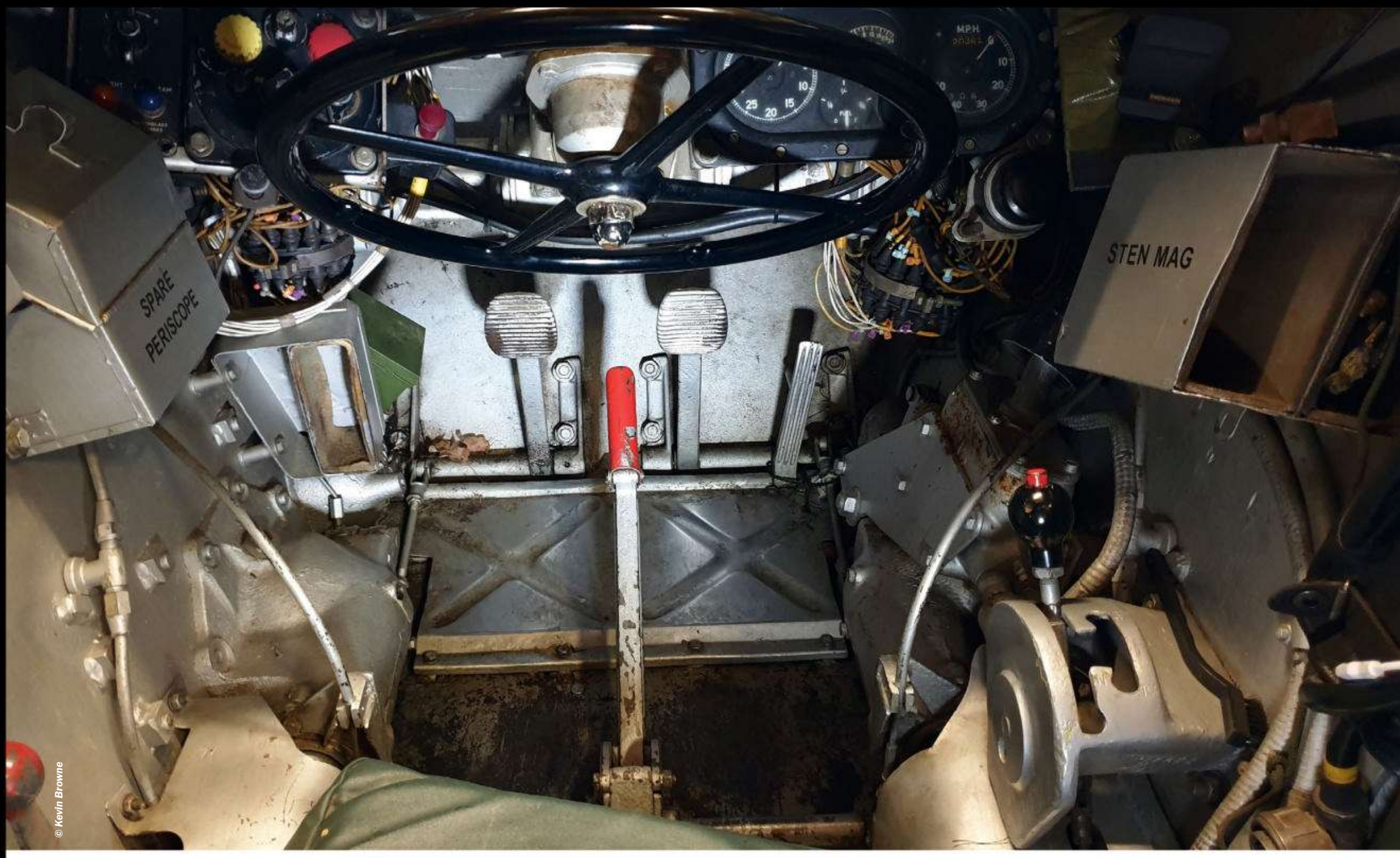
Although the Ferret is relatively quiet, which makes it ideal for sneaking up to enemy locations, the situation is very different for the crew sitting inside the vehicle, who use intercom headsets to communicate. It has an impressive top speed of 93km/h (58mph) in forward and reverse gears. In later models the square hatches were replaced with larger rhomboid-shaped side hatches to increase the driver's vision. The Mk.2 was fitted with a fully traversable turret to give the crew better protection, but at the cost of a higher profile.

*In front of the engine valve rocker-cover is the ignition distributor. To the left are fan belts and radiator fan*

*Just to the right of the silver cross-member are the four oil cooling tubes above the ignition coil*

## ENGINE

The Ferret was powered by a Rolls-Royce B60 Mk.6A 4.25-litre straight-six 120hp petrol engine. The letter 'A' signifies that the B60 engine had been adapted to fit a fluid fly wheel. In 1947 Rolls-Royce at Crewe started to manufacture the B-series of engines to power a range of different military vehicles using common components to facilitate servicing and the stocking of spare parts. It could withstand rough usage and poor fuel quality. The engine gave this 3.85ton (or 4.25 ton Mk.2) vehicle a maximum road speed of 93km/h (58mph).

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***Above:** The Ferret's steering wheel is mounted at an unusual angle to give more room for the driver's knees*

***Right:** The commander sat behind the driver. There were two temporary seats to the left and right of him*

© Kevin Browne

# CREW COMPARTMENT

The Mk.1 Ferret had a crew of three: commander, driver and machine gunner. National Service call-ups ended on 31 December 1960 and the size of the British Army drastically reduced over the following two years. This meant Ferret crews were reduced to two men, with the commander now also performing the role of machine gunner. He sat behind the driver and had to look out for traffic coming from the left or right of the vehicle as the driver's vision to the sides was poor.

© Kevin Browne

***A Ferret Mk2/3 with improved turret hatches and armour. The rear hatch functions as the commander's seat***

## SERVICE HISTORY

The Ferret has been used in conflict zones in Africa, Malaysia, Central America and during the first Gulf War. It was issued to units of the British Army of the Rhine to patrol the Iron Curtain, and saw service in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. In situations of political and civilian unrest, wheeled armoured vehicles like the Ferret were used in a policing role where the use of tracked tanks was politically unacceptable. They were also painted white and used on patrol by UN peace-keeping troops in different hot spots around the globe. It is still in service with armies in the Middle East, Africa, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Pakistan, and Nepal.

***Right:** Three soldiers from the British Army pictured with a Ferret armoured scout car on the streets of Belfast, July 1970*

© Getty

*Daimler Ferret armoured cars on a UN mission in Cyprus 1963*

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**"VEHICLES LIKE THE FERRET WERE USED IN A POLICING ROLE WHERE THE USE OF TRACKED TANKS WAS POLITICALLY UNACCEPTABLE"**

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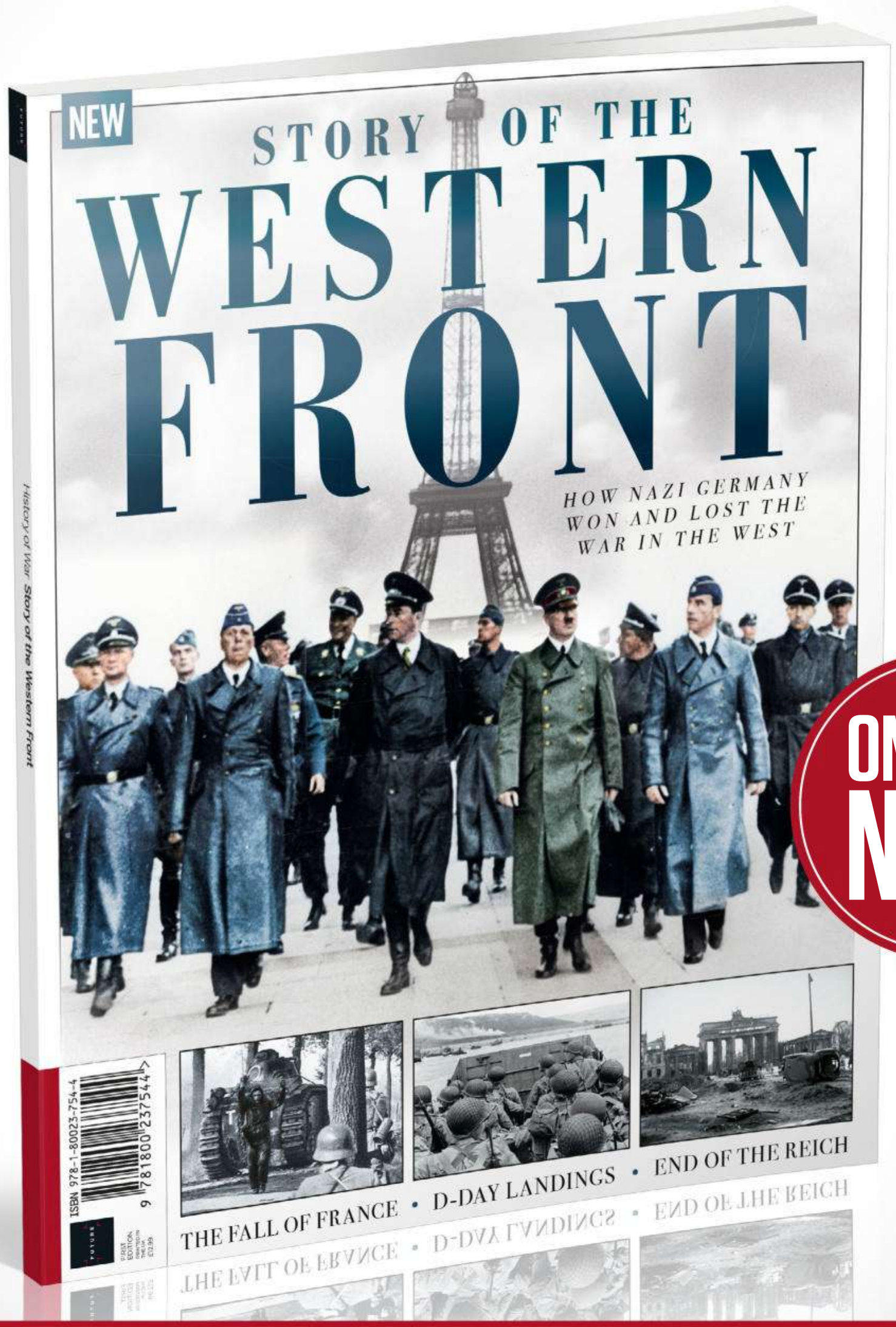
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# HOME FRONT

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IMAGES OF WAR
SS FOREIGN DIVISIONS & VOLUNTEERS OF LITHUANIA LATVIA & ESTONIA 1941-1945
IAN BAXTER

# DIARY OF A MASSACRE

Translated into English for the first time, these records provide firsthand accounts of the events leading up to the murder of over 22,000 Poles by Soviet forces in WWII

WORDS MAREK SOBIERALSKI

*Delegates from various European countries witness the exhumation of corpses from mass graves containing victims of the Katyn Massacre, April 1943*

The personal and sometimes harrowing diaries written by Polish officers during the months before they were murdered in the Katyn Massacre have been published in English for the first time. The moving entries show how the victims were unaware of the grisly fate that awaited them, and reveal their everyday lives in the Soviet camps, their thoughts, plans and dreams.

The Katyn Massacre was a series of mass executions of nearly 22,000 Polish military officers and intelligentsia that was carried out by the Soviet Union's secret police, the NKVD, in April and May 1940. This was following the Soviet Union's surprise attack on Poland on 17 September 1939 – after which Germany and Soviet Russia had carved up the country between them.

Poland's conscription system required every non-exempt university graduate to become a military reserve officer, so following the invasion the NKVD was able to round up a large number of the Polish educated class as prisoners of war. Over 200,000 people were taken into Soviet captivity as POWs; most privates were released after a relatively short time, with some being sent to labour camps, but officers were held in special NKVD camps mainly in Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov.

Once at the camps the Polish prisoners were subjected to interrogations and political agitation by NKVD officers, who tried to recruit the Poles to cooperate with them, but the vast majority refused. The prisoners assumed that they would soon be released, but the interviews were in effect a selection process to determine who would live and who would die. According to NKVD reports, if a prisoner could not be persuaded to adopt a pro-Soviet attitude, he was declared a hardened and uncompromising enemy of the Soviet state. The prisoners were permitted to correspond with their families in Poland until March 1940, when communication abruptly stopped.

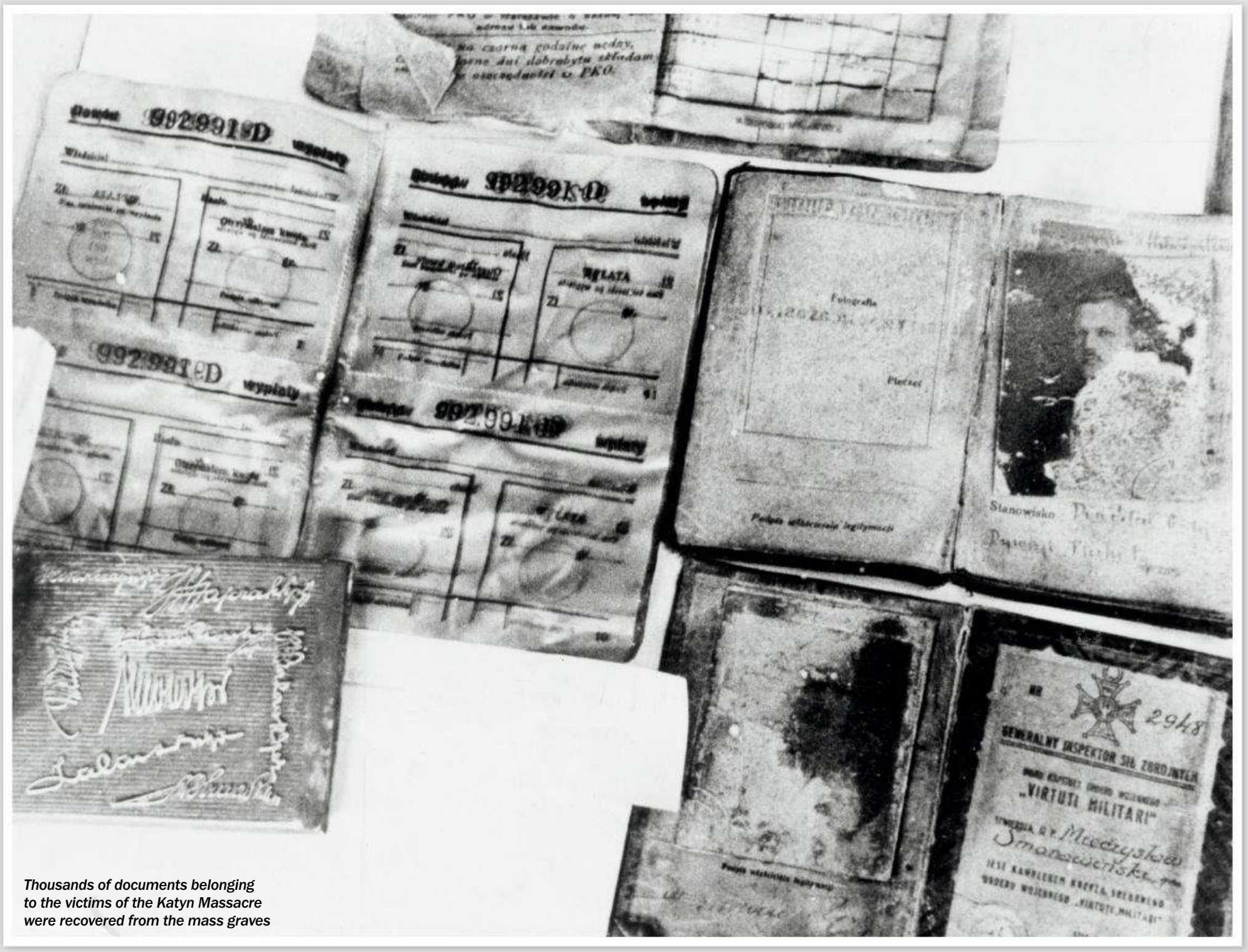
At the beginning of 1940, the Soviet authorities had decided to murder the Polish prisoners of war. On 5 March, following a note to Joseph Stalin from Beria, six members of the Soviet Politburo signed an order to execute the Polish "nationalists and counterrevolutionaries" currently detained in the various camps.

The massacre decimated the military, as well as social and political elite. The victims included an admiral, generals, officers and NCOs of every rank, as well as army chaplains and pilots. Also murdered were a prince, landowners, refugees, university professors, medical and veterinary doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, writers and journalists, priests and ministers of different religions, parliamentary deputies, civil servants, diplomats and even famous Olympians.

Mass graves were discovered in 1942, following Germany's subsequent attack on the Soviet Union, and with the bodies there were numerous Polish artefacts such as letters, diaries, photographs and identification tags. They were put into crates and evacuated westward.

Among these items were 22 diaries and personal notes, which were packed into a small crate. At the time of the discovery, the conservation and processing of the finds was carried out by a team led by Dr Jan Zygmunt Robel, a Polish forensic scientist at the Institute of Forensic Medicine and Forensics in Krakow. The documents were dirty and sometimes damaged, so the team was faced with a difficult task of preserving them and reading their contents, including many hours of carefully bathing the fragments of paper in chemicals. The team then catalogued all the documents and made four copies of each.

In May 1944, as part of Operation Most (Bridge), Lieutenant Colonel Roman Rutkowski of the Home Army handed copies of 15 of the diaries to the Polish government in exile in London. They are held at the Polish




*Thousands of documents belonging to the victims of the Katyn Massacre were recovered from the mass graves*

*All images © Getty*

Underground Movement Study Trust in London. The Trust was founded in London in 1947 and is a research and academic institution which contains historical material on the Polish Underground State during the Second World War. Among its founders were Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski and many other leading members of the Polish Underground from the war years.

Unfortunately, the original diaries have not survived. In August 1944, the Germans took the crates with the various artefacts (including the diaries) to Silesia, and then further west. It is believed that they were all burned at Radebeul near Dresden.

According to independent experts, there was no doubt who was responsible for the killings – the Soviets. But despite this many Western observers dismissed the German claims as propaganda and an attempt to divide the Allies. The truth and the crime were in fact covered up by the Allies in order to appease Stalin and preserve the alliance with the Soviet Union. In 1952, a US House Congressional Committee report found that many individuals in the US Government had deliberately withheld and dismissed information about the massacre as "pressing the search would have irritated Soviet Russia and thus hindered the prosecution of the war to a successful conclusion".

Evidence of Soviet responsibility for the Katyn Massacre was carefully concealed by the authorities for decades. It was not until 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the Russian government

**"EVIDENCE OF SOVIET RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE KATYN MASSACRE WAS CAREFULLY CONCEALED BY THE AUTHORITIES FOR DECADES"**

finally admitted that the Polish officers and intellectuals were murdered by the NKVD. In 1992 the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, ordered that copies of documents relating to the crime be given to the Poles.

The legal assessment of Poland's Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation – the investigative division of the Institute of National Remembrance – considers the massacre to be genocide, a crime against humanity and a war crime. It reached this conclusion due to the massacre's ideological motivation by class and nationality, its scale, and the then-alliance of the USSR with the Third Reich.

This Polish legal assessment of the crime continues to be rejected by Russia, the legal successor of the USSR. Russia did initiate an investigation, which concluded in 2005 and stated that the murder of Polish prisoners of war was not genocide but an "ordinary" crime. The Russian investigation also stated this crime had gone beyond the statute of limitations, occurring too long ago for any sort of legal proceedings to be initiated. In 2012 the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg judged that the Katyn Massacre was "a war crime committed by the USSR authorities".

Presented in *The Katyn Diaries* are English translations of 12 of those diaries that were dug up in 1942, which help tell the human story and open a window into the individual and personal tragedies of these very different individuals. They give us an insight into the prisoners' everyday lives in captivity and the human emotions and hardships they experienced during what was undoubtedly a difficult and testing time.

Where possible, a short biography of the diary author has been included, as well as a photograph or two, which gives the reader some additional and interesting information about the individual whose words they are about to read. The book also contains a brief description of the Katyn Massacre, as well as seven illustrations by Rafal Mroz, which add an additional visual that helps bring the diaries to life even more.

Each diary and diary author are very different, and you get a sense of the author's character and who they were. You see clear differences between these individuals while also getting a sense of their camaraderie and unity of spirit.

Reading these diaries we find out what camp life in Kozielsk was like, what the prisoners had to endure, what they were looking forward to, their fears, and even what they dreamed

*This military cemetery in Warsaw, Poland, contains the remains of 4,412 Poles murdered in the 1940 Katyn Massacre*

*German authorities excavate a mass grave where thousands of Polish officers were buried in 1940*

*All images © Getty*

about. Crucially, the diaries also enable us to better understand and reconstruct the last days before their executions.

The thing the prisoners mention the most (apart from the cold and terrible food) is the longing for their loved ones. The prisoners worried about their families, in particular their wives and children. They also wrote about the latest news from the front that was conveyed to them. They wrote on any suitable piece of paper they could get their hands on: from calendars to diaries, notebooks and loose sheets of paper – every scrap was used.

On 6 October 1939, shortly after falling into Soviet captivity, Major Adam Solski wrote: "After a good night's sleep, snow in the morning as in Poland in December. A glass of hot water and many promises of breakfast. Our money has no value. We do nothing. Quarrels – fault-finding – bickering. Until midnight we had no sustenance except hot water."

Later, on 17 October he wrote: "Nothing in particular has happened. I was the orderly and went to the kitchen for breakfast lunch and dinner… After breakfast, privates from Kielce province arrived from the region of Starobielsk, with whom they do not know what to do: whether to send them back to the border and hand them over to the Germans or to leave them. We did not find any willing to stay with us. Even one who was prosecuted in Poland for being a communist does not want to stay. What does he dislike about the SSR here? The monotony of life, mutual brown nosing and sucking up to new idols: Lenin, Stalin, Molotov – Krasnaya Armia liberator of nations…"

On Poland's independence day on 11 November, Lieutenant Maksymilian Trzepalka wrote: "(weather, warm). Independence Day. Captivity is terrible, losing freedom. We held a small service in the barrack. In the evening a colonel recited a poem, and a friend (a singer from Poznan) sang a few songs."

On Christmas Day, 25 December, Lieutenant Dobieslaw Jakubowicz wrote: "Today is our wedding anniversary Marys, and I have been so far away from you for 4 months. I believe that we shall celebrate our next anniversary and Christmas together my darling, and perhaps we may even see each other sooner. It is difficult to describe how I feel at the moment, but you know such feelings well – longing. I feel sad and I think I cannot write any more Marys. General news de publicis is wonderful and getting better, so we have a beautiful gift. Apparently we are to leave on 7.1.40, so we will see each other soon Marys. Lying here I imagine how Bozenka is already running around, how I will play with her, and of you my love, how I will greet you and other things, which I will not write about here. You stand before my eyes throughout the day Marys my darling, and I miss you so much that I cannot relax. Maybe you are thinking about me today, on our anniversary, I have your beautiful image constantly before my eyes."

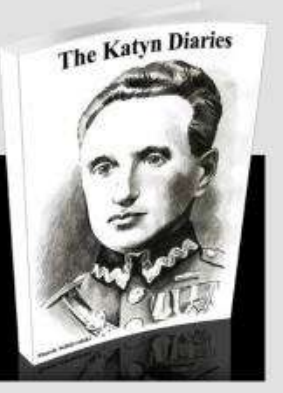
On 1 April 1940, as the killings commence, Major Kazimierz Szczekowski wrote: "At last the bomb has gone off. The first transport with about 100 people left today – various ranks, ages and origins, to where it is not known."

Szczekowski continued: "Huge excitement in the camp. They say that by the end of the month, we will all be taken away, but we do not know to where. A few hundred more prisoners departed today, supposedly for distribution camps to the west. And outside it has cooled, as if from spite. Departures continue. I am also ready – linen washed, boots repaired."

On 12 April, while the killings were taking place, Lieutenant Bronislaw Wajs wrote: "Barred prison wagons for convicts. Without food or water. 6 of us prisoners of war in a 1 x 2 compartment. Layover in Smolensk. 22:00 porridge already cold."

From reading these harrowing diaries and notes we do not go through the final violent moments with the authors, but we know their terrible fate only too well.

*The Katyn Diaries* by Marek Sobieralski is available to buy on Amazon, in paperback or on Kindle



# MUSEUMS & EVENTS

## Discover historian James Holland's exhibition on the development of tanks, the new British Red Cross Museum, and research focussing on US Civil War sailors

*By the end of World War II, the Sherwood Rangers had received more battle honours than any other single British Army unit*

*A Sherwood Ranger tank travelling in convoy through the ruins of Geldern, Germany, on 6 March 1945*

# National Army Museum Tank Exhibition

**James Holland, author of *Brothers in Arms*, has teamed up with the National Army Museum to highlight the changing role of tanks in WWII**

Located in Chelsea, London, the National Army Museum has joined up with the internationally acclaimed and award-winning historian, writer and broadcaster James Holland to present a new temporary exhibition. This event, called Brothers in Arms, after Holland's book of the same title, will run until 6 May 2022, examining how the use of tanks on the battlefield has adapted to the ever-changing circumstances of modern conflict.

The fascinating story will be told through the lens of the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry during the Second World War, a unit hardened under the burning sun of North Africa before landing on Gold Beach on D-Day and fighting relentlessly until the German surrender.

Visitors to the Brothers in Arms exhibition can expect to learn about the harrowing experiences of the servicemen behind the armour plates via expert analysis and eye-witness testimony. From the dangers and pressures faced by the crew every day to the camaraderie and bonds that brought them together, the display will feature many objects and personal effects of those who served in the Sherwood Rangers. This includes the wallet that saved Captain Stan Perry's life, a nine of hearts card found by Lieutenant Colonel Stanley Christopherson that became his lucky keepsake, and Lieutenant Harry Heenan's last letter home prior to being killed aged 21.

Speaking about the partnership with the National Army Museum, Holland, who curates the exhibition, said: "It's very exciting… I hope everyone visiting will come away with a greater understanding – and even appreciation – of not only how brutal those last 11 months of the war in Europe [after D-Day] were for those in the front line of the action, but also with a shared sense of the awe that I feel for those who somehow kept going. They were certainly extraordinary men, and it is a privilege to tell their story."

An events programme will run alongside Brothers in Arms, both in the museum and online, offering guided tours, talks and a live podcast stream of *We Have Ways of Making You Talk* with James Holland and comedian Al Murray. Additionally, an unmissable Sherman tank will be situated outside the institute for a close-up glimpse of how regiments such as the Sherwood Rangers navigated the battlefield. While admission is free to anyone interested, the National Army Museum recommends booking tickets online to avoid missing out. Doors are open Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 5.30pm.

*The National Army Museum in Chelsea, the British Army's central museum*

***Left:** Sergeant Nelson Recce and his crew became the first British soldiers to enter Germany when they crossed the border on 23 September 1944*

**For more information visit: www.nam.ac.uk**

*Images courtesy of the Imperial War Museum unless otherwise stated*

# British Red Cross Museum opens its doors

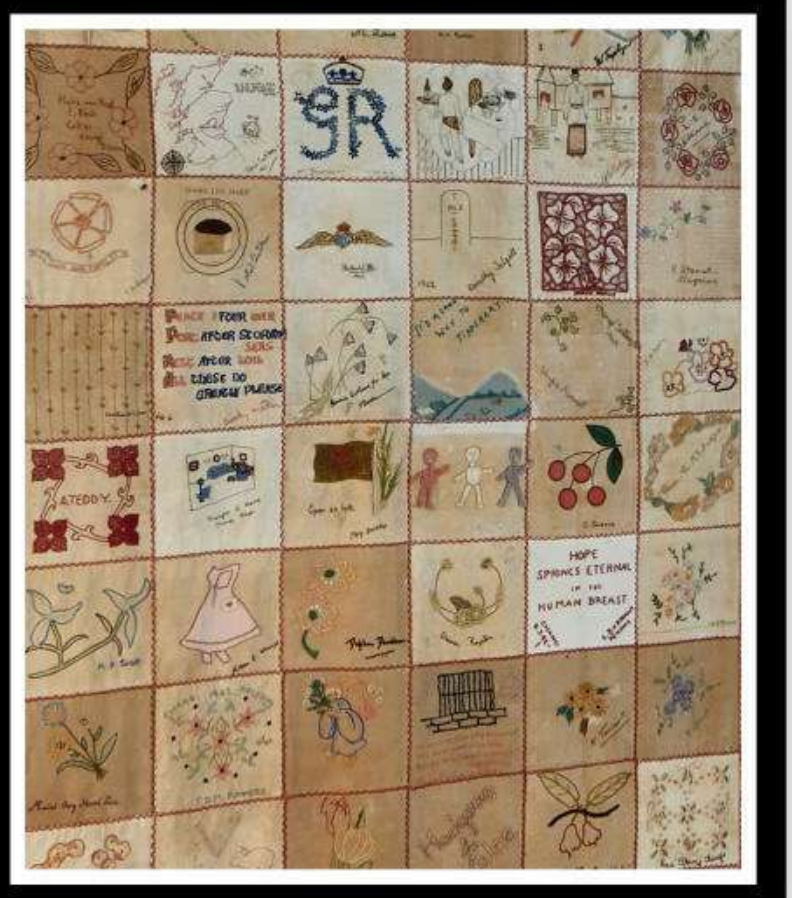
## Opened in December 2021, this museum showcases over 150 years of the society, including its role in numerous conflicts

Located at its headquarters in Moorgate, London, the British Red Cross Museum has recently opened its doors to the public. The collection includes a wide variety of historical and contemporary items, not least several pieces related to the conflicts that the British Red Cross was engaged in while saving countless lives. Among them is the Changi quilt, which was made by Allied internees of the Japanese Changi prison during the Second World War.

When the British stronghold of Singapore surrendered to the Japanese in February 1942, thousands of doctors, teachers, nurses, nuns, missionaries, police and their families found themselves at the mercy of the invading forces. Women and children from Britain, Denmark, Australia, Canada and beyond were separated from the men and forbidden from communicating. Patchwork quilts, created by women prisoners and permitted by authorities to be sent to other camps, not only alleviated stress and boredom, they also served as a means to reach out to husbands and male relatives interned elsewhere with secret coded messages and symbols stitched within the 66 squares of fabric. For many men, these artfully sewn patches were a sign that their loved ones were still alive.

Mehzebin Adam, the British Red Cross Museum curator, tells *History of War*: "I'm delighted to put the world-famous Changi quilt on exhibition for the public to see at the British Red Cross Museum. [It] shows the innovative ways families stayed in touch during the Second World War and the importance of reuniting families separated by conflict. Today, the Red Cross continues to help families find missing loved ones… through the Restoring Family Links service."

For more information: www.redcross.org.uk




*Mrs Ethel Mulvany, a Canadian internee and a Red Cross representative, came up with the idea for the Changi quilt*

*Image © British Red Cross Museum and Archives*

# Remembering the Civil War's Black sailors

## The lives and experiences of African American and immigrant sailors during the American Civil War will be explored in a new study

Around 118,000 sailors served in the US Navy during the American Civil War, 30 per cent of whom were first-generation British or Irish immigrants, and 15 per cent of whom were African Americans. Now, a £685,000 study led by Northumbria University, Newcastle, intends to bring their stories to life. The research project, called Civil War Bluejackets: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the United States Navy, 1861-1865, will include the creation of newly digitised muster rolls – registers of the officers and men on Union Naval vessels – from the conflict. This is expected to provide a valuable online resource for both social historians and people looking to discover their family histories.

The pilot study, started in 2020, was undertaken by Professor David Gleeson and Damian Shiels in collaboration with the University of Sheffield information scientists Dr Morgan Harvey and Dr Frank Hopfgartner. Its next stages will begin in March 2022, examining the experiences of United States Navy sailors (called 'Bluejackets' for their short shell-jacket uniforms) in the hope of better understanding the issues of race, class and ethnicity throughout the war and the proceeding years.

Commenting on the project's significance to descendants, Professor Gleeson said: "As well as providing a fascinating insight for fellow academics and researchers… [the study] should also be of particular interest to… African American genealogists, as many of the formerly enslaved first appeared in their own right with full names on ship musters as they claimed equality through naval service." The findings will be presented at a final conference at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in February 2025.



*The project's analysed the muster of USS Pittsburgh, detailing 151 individuals, 40 per cent of whom were Black servicemen*

*Union naval vessels worked tirelessly to blockade Confederate ports and control internal waterways of the United States during the Civil War*

*First-generation British and Irish Americans, initially recruited in port cities, provide an excellent case study of urban working-class lives at that time*

*Images © Library of Congress, Washington DC*

For more visit: www.civilwarbluejackets.com

*Stephen Keoghane is a consultant surgeon in the NHS and for 22 years was regimental medical officer to the Royal Wessex Yeomanry. He served as a trauma surgeon in Afghanistan and left regimental duty as a lieutenant colonel in 2016. He has published widely both in the field of surgery and now military history.*

*In World War II the yeomen had to adapt quickly to a very different type of warfare*

# YEOMANRY AT WAR: FROM HORSES TO TRUCKS

## In 1941 the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry served in the Middle East and North Africa, where they soon swapped their traditional mounts for vehicles. So how did the prestigious cavalry regiment fare with its switch to motorised warfare in the harsh desert conditions?

In 1794 the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry (Prince of Wales' Own Royal Regiment) came into existence at the Bear Hotel in Devizes, which today remains the RWY's spiritual home. The motto 'Primus in Armis', meaning 'First in Arms', reflects the regiment's position in the order of precedence decided by the War Office in 1885.

Following mobilisation in September 1939 the regiment continued with mounted training in rural Somerset and Nottinghamshire, with the awful winter weather the only significant threat to the horses' welfare and the troops' morale. A bitterly cold January followed and on the 30th of that month the order to move overseas was finally received. By February 1940, the RWY had left England with a strength of 33 officers and 752 other ranks; the journey south and away from the miserable English winter had started.

As one of the few remaining yeomanry regiments retaining horses, and a constituent of the 1st Cavalry Division, the regiment travelled by train across France and in March 1940 sailed from Marseille for Haifa in Palestine.

The journey across the Mediterranean in a crowded troopship, where at night manure was manhandled overboard from the lower decks to avoid detection by submarine, was extremely uncomfortable for both man and horse. Life soon improved with their arrival in Palestine as the troops and their mounts acclimatised over the next few months, with ample opportunities for sightseeing trips throughout the Holy Land. It became clear that cavalry had no future in the British Army due to motorisation, and the number of horses was gradually reduced from January 1941 onwards. For many yeomen, who'd been sharpening their swords in anticipation of combat, this was a devastating blow after the regiment's 150 years as mounted troops. Over the next three months the Wiltshire yeomen accepted with enthusiasm the challenge of fighting from 15cwt Morris trucks.

In 1941, as now, the situation in Iraq was unstable. The Arabs were convinced that Britain had no future in the region and the

political situation soon worsened when a new pro-German prime minister, Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, took control of the country and its precious oil reserves.

By 1 April, the regiment, less B Squadron, which was at Tobruk, was established in the Palestinian hill town of Nablus, poised for a move to Irbid in Transjordan and then onwards to Iraq. The regiment now formed part of Habforce, a newly raised mobile desert column based around the 4th Cavalry Brigade.

The RWY started on what would become an epic trek through the desert in May, and spent a very unpleasant two weeks guarding the pumping stations along the vital oil pipeline that stretched from Kirkuk in Iraq to Haifa. Patrols in the Iraqi desert continued as spring turned to early summer and the temperature soared, accompanied by occasional air raids from Vichy French aircraft.

On 20 June the regiment was moved to the Syrian frontier for its next task. Syria was garrisoned by the substantial pro-Vichy L'Armée du Levant which included colonial troops from North Africa and Senegal, Syrian Druze and Lebanese forces. More importantly, it also boasted the tough 6e Régiment Étranger d'Infanterie (6REI) from the French Foreign Legion. The strategic concern facing the Allies was the real possibility that Axis forces would utilise the Syrian desert air strips to mount attacks on Egypt.

On 21 June 1941 the commanding officer Lieutenant Colonel Williams, accompanied by soldiers from the Arab Legion, led the advance towards the ancient and ruined city of Palmyra, 160km from the Iraq border. The column reached Juffa, 80km inside Syria, where a lone French aircraft escaped to warn the main Vichy garrisons at Homs and Palmyra.

Arriving at the outskirts of Palmyra at 11am the CO briefed his squadrons and revealed the objective of Yellow Ridge, the most prominent landmark, which was occupied by dug-in French machine guns. Foot patrols were sent forward but progress was painfully slow without air support or artillery. The attrition rate was high; the troops sheltered in slit trenches and suffered in the intense heat for 12 days, and the regiment's vehicles were systematically destroyed. The relentless Vichy air attacks were difficult to counter with only rifles and outdated Hotchkiss machine guns.

In 2018 veteran Ken Batt recalled his orders from his troop sergeant, Sergeant Bannister: "Get up that hill and if you see anyone in front of you, shoot them." When interviewed after the war about their experiences, Batt and his surviving comrades from the RWY said the Vichy French forces were intensely disliked, more so than the Germans or Italians.

By 26 June, the daily bombing and strafing had reduced as the RAF stepped up activity against the French, and together with the arrival of artillery support the tide began to turn. On 3 July the enemy garrison surrendered.

The capture of the garrison allowed the regiment to re-organise, as described by the Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant Leslie Wheeler: "While at Palmyra, we were also able to re-equip ourselves with vehicles, guns and ammunition that had all been captured from the French Foreign Legion. Ford pickups and large Renault and Peugeot lorries seemed to appear from nowhere and were soon painted with the regimental and brigade signs. No longer were we short of vehicles, water containers or working machine guns… Almost overnight we had become a formidable force."

Following the fall of Palmyra the regiment prepared for an attack on Homs, but after the Syrian armistice the yeomen instead trekked northwards to Aleppo, where the 4th Cavalry Brigade was now concentrating. The RWY bivouacked in olive groves north-east of the town – after the incessant heat and glare of the desert sun the shade was most welcome, as was the abundance of fruit after a tedious diet of bully beef and biscuits. In the evenings the yeomen were allowed into Aleppo, which was full of French soldiers. It was an odd sight as the French Foreign Legion had previously been the despised enemy at Palmyra. It was at Aleppo on 4 August that B Squadron rejoined and the regiment was once more united.

## Operation Countenance

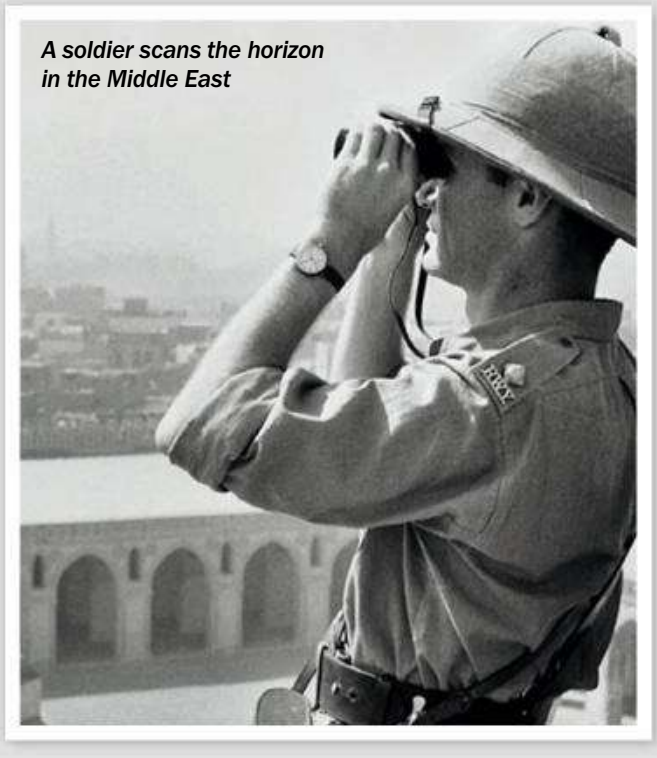
The importance of a direct transport route to Russia via the Caspian Sea, and the vital oil pipeline, led to this rather overlooked expedition against the pro-German Persians. The Allied advance into Persia commenced on 26 August 1941 through treacherous mountainous countryside. However, the campaign was not to be a prolonged one: after only two days the regiment was awakened by shellfire but by lunchtime the Persian forces had surrendered.

Despite this surrender the region remained turbulent because of fighting between Persian and Iraqi Kurds and the general inclination for deserters from the Persian Army and locals to loot whenever possible. Malaria, small pox and typhus were also a constant threat to Allied troops, who were told to stay away from inhabited towns and villages.

On 15 September, the regimental column began the move towards Tehran over dreadfully potholed and corrugated roads. The plan was for a simultaneous entry to Tehran by Allied forces from the south and Soviets from the north, but the Russians chose to ignore this and entered the Persian capital much earlier than agreed.

Nevertheless, the Persian adventure had achieved its aim: stabilising the country and establishing a supply route to Russia for the remainder of the war.

The RWY had now taken part in three separate campaigns fighting from their exposed and uncomfortable trucks. But more importantly, since leaving Palestine the yeomen had learned to survive in harsh desert conditions during this arduous 13,000km excursion.



*A soldier scans the horizon in the Middle East*

© Stephen Keoghane

## HIS SERENE HIGHNESS PRINCE ALY KHAN

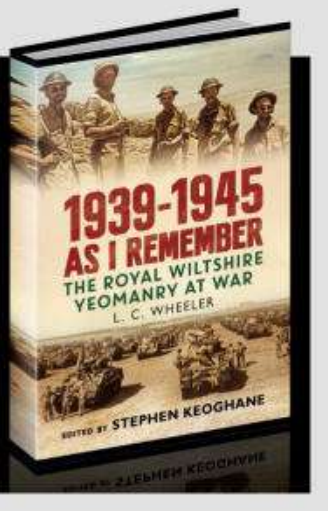
**Very little has been written about the military career of this flamboyant and internationally famous member of the regiment. Born in 1911, Prince Aly Khan, son of Aga Khan, the leader of the Ismaili Muslims, joined the French Foreign Legion in 1939 and was immediately posted to Beirut. In late 1940, disillusioned with the Vichy French, he like many other Frenchmen crossed the border into Palestine; the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry war diary records Aly Khan coming onto regimental strength in November. He was already well known to some of the aristocratic yeomanry officers, including Lord Weymouth and Earl Cadogan.**

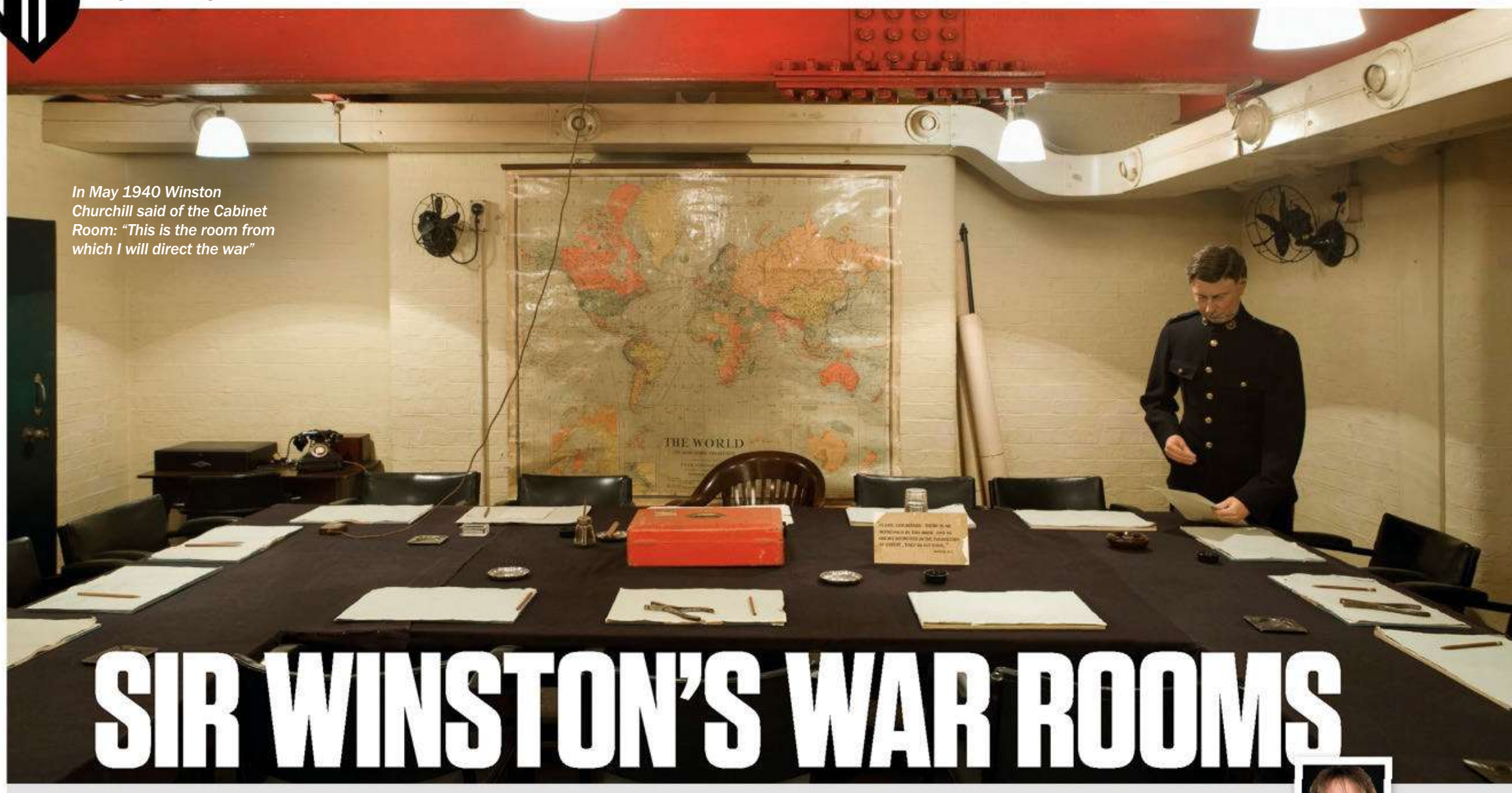
**However, Aly Khan didn't spend much time at regimental duty as military intelligence in Cairo soon heard about his recruitment, his knowledge of Syria and its people, and his fluency in multiple languages. He went on to serve as a liaison officer with the US Army and ended the war as a respected lieutenant colonel. In later life the prince would say that his time spent as a soldier was some of his happiest.**

Image: Wiki / PD / Gov

*Prince Aly Khan pictured on his wedding day, 1949*

*1939-45 As I Remember: The Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry at War*, edited by Stephen Keoghane and based on the memoirs of Captain Leslie Wheeler, is available now from Fonthill Media






*In May 1940 Winston Churchill said of the Cabinet Room: "This is the room from which I will direct the war"*

# SIR WINSTON'S WAR ROOMS

## Nigel Steel, principal historian and curator at Imperial War Museums' Churchill War Rooms, takes us on a guided tour

***Right:** Nigel Steel is curator at the Churchill War Rooms and one of Imperial War Museums' principal historians. He's the author of numerous books on Gallipoli, the First World War in the air, and more*

Utilised by the prime minister and government during the Second World War, the Churchill War Rooms provide a unique insight into how Britain's leaders led the war effort during those perilous times. Nigel Steel is part of the team that preserves and tells the history of the War Rooms. Here, he discusses their origins, how they were used during the war and how their history has been rediscovered and retold in the post-war years.

***Could you describe how the War Rooms came into being?***

Throughout the 1930s the British government became increasingly aware of the growing threat in the centre of Europe: Adolf Hitler consolidates power and Benito Mussolini is a lesser but noisy threat. Meanwhile the Japanese scrap naval treaties and move aggressively across China during the period. There was an increasing sense that Britain needed to prepare. Britain was the first country to undergo sustained air attack during World War I, by German aircraft and airships, and it made people aware that it could be struck by bigger aircraft and more powerful bombs. There was a worry that devastating air attacks could disable and destroy vital infrastructure.

By 1937, the authorities in London began to think about how to maintain control, order and function if a devastating air attack came about. The chiefs of staff debated whether to stay in the centre of London or go to the suburbs or somewhere far away to be better protected. In the interim, they decided to look at an emergency central war room where the chiefs of staff and their teams could go to continue their work. By the late spring, they looked at the centre of London and what is now the Government Offices, Great St George Street. The building had a steel frame and it was felt to be very strong.

In May 1938, work was being done on the basement by the Office of Works. During the Munich Crisis, this was a dress rehearsal. Government officials realised they needed better conditions for living and working and they set to work to remedy all that. They put in new timber shoring and metal beams, an air trunking system to pump in air from the outside, new brick fortifications and filled in various parts to make it better. By the spring of 1939 this set of offices was ready to be used. The central war room was ready and mobilised on 27 August 1939 and stayed open 24/7 for the next five years. The central war room became known as the Cabinet War Room, and there was a complement of offices. It was truly a British endeavour to make it suitable and adapt it for use. However, it was only 10ft underground and if compared with Hitler's Reich Chancellery in Berlin, at 28ft, it was not suitable for war. In 1940 Churchill was shocked to learn that the war rooms were not bombproof, so they filled in the floor between the basement and the ground floor of the building with a concrete roof to extend back over what is now the Churchill Museum.

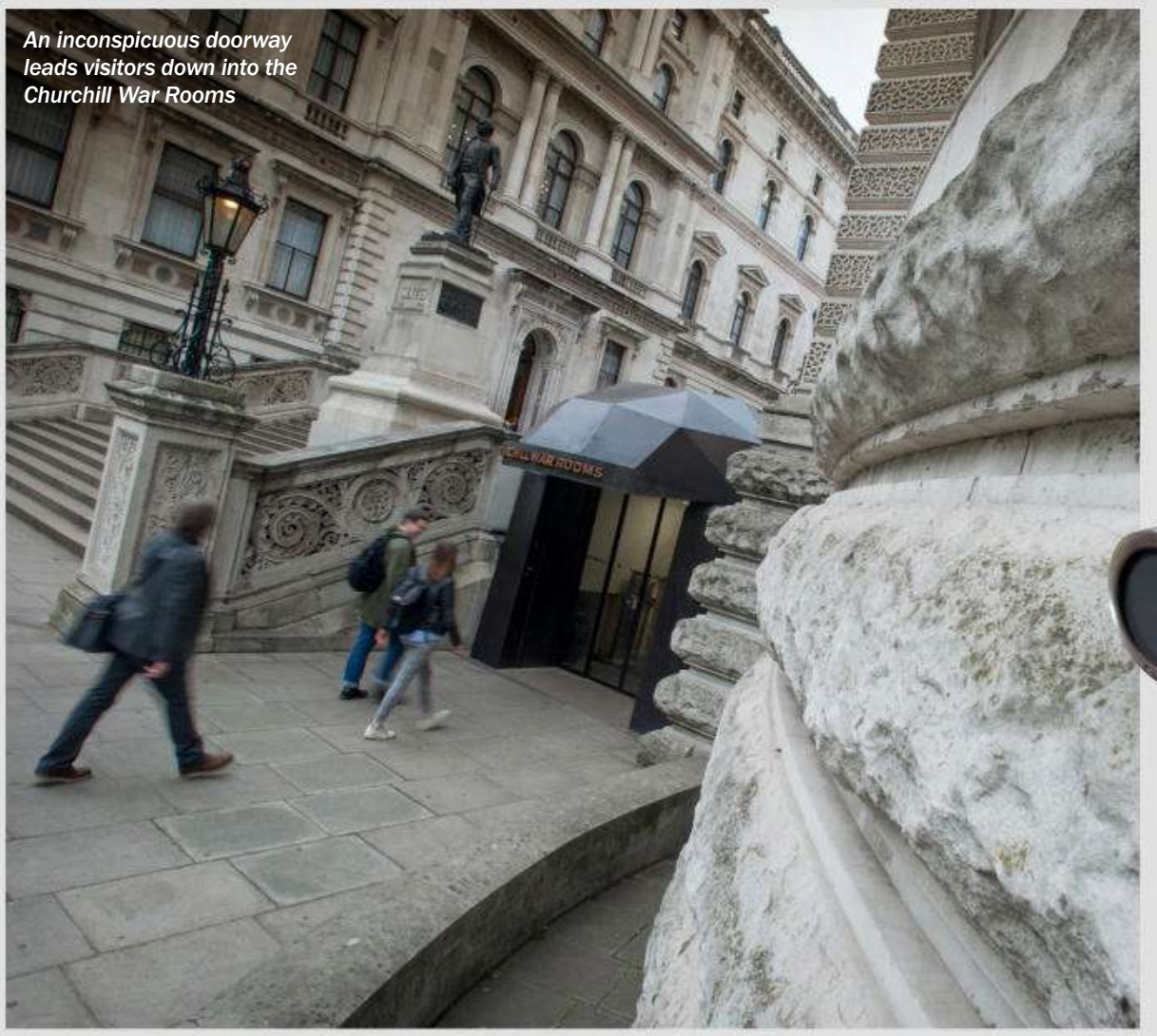
***Can you describe some of the functions and decision-making that went on?***

The War Cabinet met on a regular basis, conducting the business of the government. From October 1940 to the end of the Blitz in April and May 1941, all the decisions were made underground as the chiefs of staff met every day, six days a week. In the Cabinet Room they looked at strategy, and the work of the intelligence and planning staff in the Map Room continued round the clock.

The most important part was the Map Room. Here information was processed, collated and interpreted, along with all the intelligence coming from the Allies, and everything was plotted on maps along with charts and graphs. There were four watches and one of four officers would be running it at any given time. Like today, as we are used to seeing news with a main screen headline and a banner across the bottom, you could ask one of these guys, "What's the state of the war?" and they could tell you up to within the last hour or so. We are used to processing bits of information at the same time, and the Map Room was like that. It was state of the art, the core of the war. Events that were happening on all fronts were captured in the Map Room, and that's the most important part. You can almost feel it, with the production of war bulletins every day.

***What was it like to work in the War Rooms? Were there sleeping quarters?***

Visitors may tend to look at what went on in the War Rooms as the work of the elite but the vast majority of people were ordinary men and women, officers, orderlies and civilians such as typists and those running the telephone exchanges. Among them were many highly intelligent women who acted as personal assistants and supported two



*An inconspicuous doorway leads visitors down into the Churchill War Rooms*

*Churchill's bedroom was located next to the Map Room*

*Churchill's desk was equipped with a microphone linked to the BBC Broadcasting Room*

*All images © IWM*

## IWM CHURCHILL WAR ROOMS

**The War Rooms are open Wednesday to Sunday from 9.30am to 6pm (last entry 5pm). For more information visit: www.iwm.org.uk**

bodies of people: the joint planning staff and the joint intelligence staff. These people worked 24/7 in the War Rooms, sometimes under bombing and late into the night until they couldn't go home. In the room known as the 'dock', the basement's basement, they had beds and primitive sanitation, but they could go up a floor to use bathrooms. People did live there, but not all the time.

The Office of Works was constantly asked for more rooms and, increasingly, it became a civilisation really, with workers conscious that it was not really a safe place – but safe enough. My guess is that it was a bit like working in the White House, feeling that you were at the heart of things with everybody focused and feeding through their job into something that reached the highest levels.

***What happened to the War Rooms after the end of the Second World War?***

Even as the war ended people were very conscious of the important things that had happened there, so people were very careful with the War Rooms as they closed down. In 1947, officials became aware that certain parts should be preserved. They decided to keep the Cabinet Room, the prime minister's bedroom and office, the Map Room next door and the trans-Atlantic phone room where there was a direct hotline through to President Franklin D Roosevelt. In 1948, there was a press conference announcing that these rooms would be preserved as a memorial to those who served there and to Britain's war effort. George Rance [clerk and custodian of the Cabinet War Rooms] had run the site and showed people around, and it was kept on that basis for some time.

In the 1980s, it was decided to make the War Rooms more available to the public and the Imperial War Museums were asked to make the site more accessible. In the mid-80s we did a big inventory of everything that was there and began to create a visitor experience. Other rooms were reconstituted with the aid of photos that had been taken before the areas were emptied. A flow with doors was created so that visitors 'walk through the walls'. In the Map Room, there is a glass with visitors on one side and the protected room on the other. There was no glass during the war, but this allows visitors to take a clear route through the room. Today this is done with sight and sound guides and the history of the rooms is explained. It has become a good trip.

***What has taken place with the War Rooms more recently?***

The War Rooms remain government property, and the Treasury is the main tenant of the building above. When they rearranged some things in the late 1990s we were given permission to take on more space. A second set of rooms is accessible today, including space that was occupied by the joint planning staff and the Churchill Museum. The museum was built with brilliant work around architectural restrictions and opened in January 2005.

Expanding the site and offering a more complete visitor experience was the goal, and Phil Reed [director of the IWM's Churchill War Rooms for more than 20 years] wanted to create a greater sense of place. Sometimes people look at the Blitz and think it was just that, but it had much more to do with the whole war.

***What does the future hold for the War Rooms and the IWM's involvement with the unique historical site?***

Preservation is an ongoing business, including new pieces of interpretation in the chiefs of staff conference room. People's perspectives change and we work to interpret what level of understanding they bring to our sites. We're constantly looking at what we can do across the whole of the Imperial War Museums to keep things relevant, exciting and engaging. Fundamentally, a visit to the Churchill Museum is fantastic, but that was a life of Churchill created and built in the early 2000s. Now we are 20 years beyond that and a new generation looks at it in different ways, so we will constantly change.

The War Rooms is a great site. It has the atmosphere of an historical site, maintained and presented as it would look during its use. Even if you go there two or three times a week, you continue to have the sense that this is where the people came to make great decisions during the war. I am a number-one fan of the Map Room – the way it was organised as the ticking brain of the war fascinates me. We hope the War Rooms stay as exciting and vital for all visitors to all IWM sites. These are the corridors where Churchill walked, where he laid down for an afternoon snooze, where he and his staff made monumental decisions. You can feel it. It's powerful!

WWII THIS MONTH...

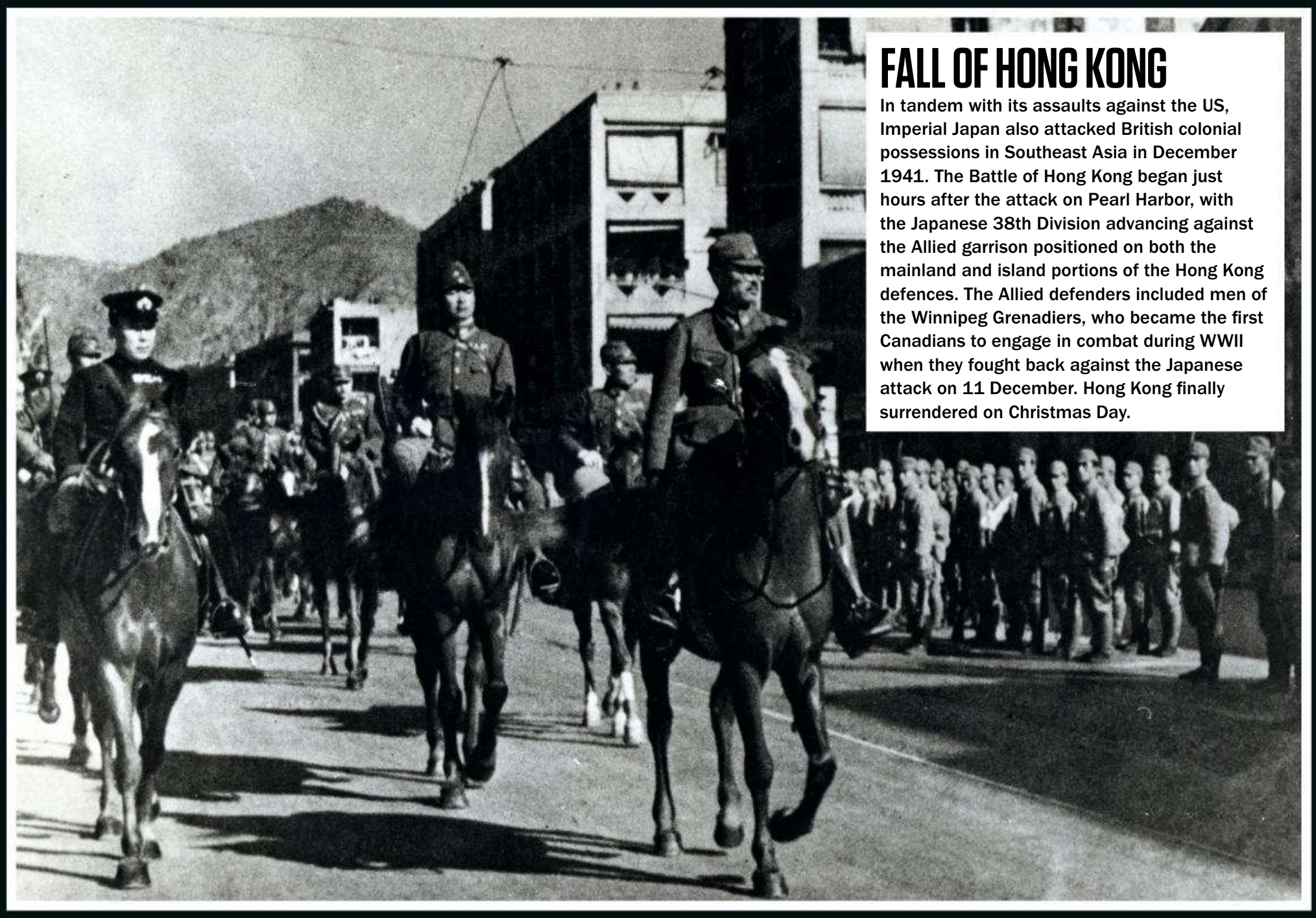
# DECEMBER 1941

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place during each month of the conflict

## BATTLE OF WAKE ISLAND

Wrecked Wildcat fighter planes are pictured in the aftermath of the Battle of Wake Island. Located 3,200km west of Hawaii, the island was manned by a small garrison of just over 500 officers and men, a majority of whom were US Marines. The initial Japanese attack was repulsed by the Americans, who held out on the island until 23 December, when amphibious troops landed and overwhelmed them. The Japanese lost two ships , one submarine, 21 aircraft and approximately 1,000 casualties during the fight for Wake Island. Imperial Japan maintained its occupation until 1945.

All images © Getty

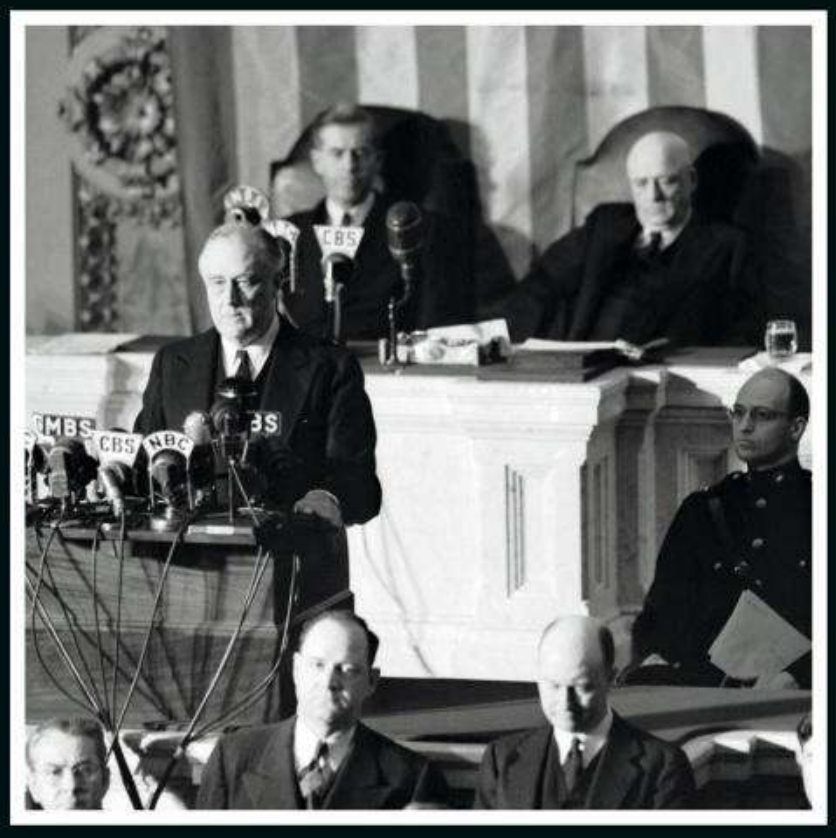


## FALL OF HONG KONG

In tandem with its assaults against the US, Imperial Japan also attacked British colonial possessions in Southeast Asia in December 1941. The Battle of Hong Kong began just hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, with the Japanese 38th Division advancing against the Allied garrison positioned on both the mainland and island portions of the Hong Kong defences. The Allied defenders included men of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, who became the first Canadians to engage in combat during WWII when they fought back against the Japanese attack on 11 December. Hong Kong finally surrendered on Christmas Day.

## DAY OF INFAMY SPEECH

After the attacks on Pearl Harbor and other American possessions, President Franklin D Roosevelt gave a speech to the nation in which he referred to 7 December as a "date which will live in infamy". Roosevelt went on to condemn the surprise attack and affirmed the United States' commitment to self-defence. "With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph – so help us God," he exclaimed.



## THE SOUND OF FREEDOM

The famous Trapp singing family pictured around Christmas time. The 1959 stage musical *The Sound of Music*, made into a film of the same name in 1965, dramatised the family's escape from the Nazis. Instead of fleeing over the Alps to Switzerland, as in the movie, the real Trapp family emigrated to the US in 1939 and later became American citizens.

# REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books and films

# THE WORST MILITARY LEADERS IN HISTORY

## FIFTEEN FRAUDS, POLITICIANS, CRIMINALS AND THE SIMPLY CLUELESS WHO FAILED DISMALLY IN THEIR ROLE AS MILITARY COMMANDERS

**Editors:** John M Jennings & Chuck Steele **Publisher:** Reaktion Books **Price:** £16.99 **On sale:** February 2022

This book examines a rogues' gallery of military leaders from across history who may be judged to have failed as a result of their own errors rather than through the brilliance of an opposing commander. Some of them failed in terms of strategic vision and planning, some because of tactical ineptitude, and others as the result of serious flaws of character.

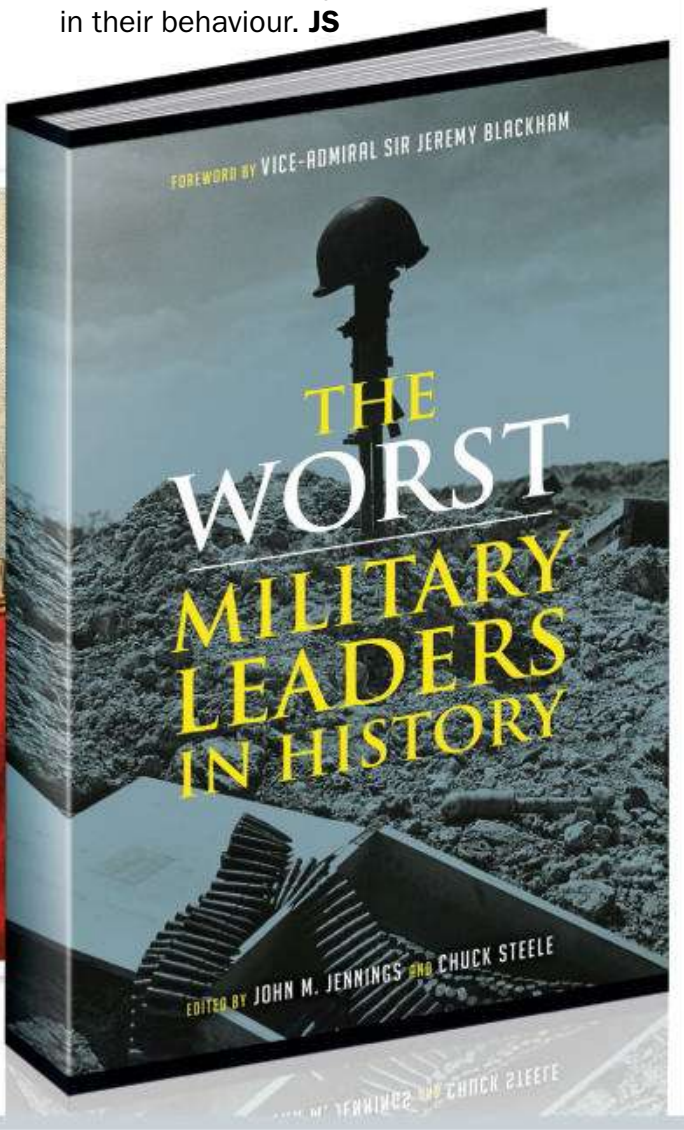
The core argument put forth in these essays is that for every commander who has won acclaim for solving immense problems in the crucible of war, there is at least one other who has failed to do so. While losing is not always the hallmark of a lack of ability, there are some commanders who have managed to fail for various reasons as spectacularly as those who had succeeded. Every leader examined in these pages came unstuck in a particularly noteworthy manner.

The most prominent character cited in the 'Criminals' classification is Roman Fedorovich von Ungern-Sternberg, who led a reckless and ill-fated White Army invasion of the Soviet Union. Ungern-Sternberg, whose contemporaries dubbed him the 'Bloody Baron', behaved like a warlord. He launched a foray into Mongolia, planning to use it as the springboard for an offensive against the Soviet Union. Despite a lack of enthusiasm among the Mongols for his crusade, Ungern-Sternberg nevertheless invaded the Soviet Union, with predictably disastrous results. Ultimately his own troops, exasperated by defeat and Ungern-Sternberg's brutal leadership, mutinied and turned him over to the Reds, who duly shot him.

Britain's Field Marshal Garnet Joseph Wolseley is awarded pride of place in the 'Bunglers' section. Arrogant, bitter and vain, Wolseley badly underestimated the nature of the Mahdi when he led the Nile Expedition for the relief of General Charles Gordon at the besieged garrison at Khartoum. Wolseley's unusual strategy was to take an expedition by boat up the Nile and then to cross the desert to Khartoum, while the naval boats went on to the city. The expedition arrived too late, after Khartoum had been taken and Gordon was dead. It was Wolseley who had pressed for a relief force to be sent to Khartoum. But as a commander, the author stresses, he never faced a first-class enemy in his career. "This alone precludes him from being considered a great captain, notwithstanding a reputation won through many a hard-fought campaign and burnished at Tel el-Kebir in 1882," he writes. "That he failed in his last expedition is the lament of many a commander and testifies to his limitations as a military leader."

The names of some of these hapless military commanders will resonate with the reader. General George A Custer is an obvious contender for the 'Clueless' category for his disaster at the Battle of Little Bighorn. Mexican General Antonio López de Santa Anna's failure was a fundamental lack of preparedness to lead men in war, coupled with an egotism that blinded him to his ineptitude. He is therefore included in the 'Frauds' section. On it goes, a tally of tragedy inflicted on troops and civilians alike by leaders at best, inept and at worst, immoral in their behaviour. **JS**

*Garnet Joseph Wolseley features in the book's 'Bunglers' section, for his failure during the relief of Khartoum*


FOREWORD BY VICE-ADMIRAL SIR JEREMY BLACKHAM
THE WORST MILITARY LEADERS IN HISTORY
EDITED BY JOHN M. JENNINGS AND CHUCK STEELE

# RESISTANCE 1942

## THIS WORLD WAR II RESISTANCE STORY HAS A GREAT PREMISE BUT IS LET DOWN BY SOME DUBIOUS ACCENTS AND POOR WRITING

**Director:** Matthew Hill and Landon Johnson **Studio:** Signature Entertainment **Released:** DVD & Digital 10 January

It's the summer of 1940 and France, a once formidable nation, lies defeated and dejected, now ruled by its new German masters in collaboration with the puppet Vichy Government. With the British having scrambled to evacuate from Dunkirk there is no prospect of salvation, and by the end of 1941 necessities such as food and medicine have become perishingly scarce. However, a courageous few refuse to be beaten and instead resist the Third Reich.

Among them is Jacques, a former pastor from Alsace-Lorraine (played by Cary Elwes, who doesn't quite stretch to the accent but is far from alone in not doing so) who has taken to broadcasting illegal radio messages from an attic in Lyon. He is accompanied by his daughter, Juliet, an elderly Jewish couple and another dissident named Yanko. In order to maintain his radio, and thereby the hopes of those listening, Jacques relies on Juliet bravely sourcing the required equipment while also attempting to squirrel away enough money to purchase the necessary paperwork to get them all out of the country. Unfortunately for the group, the determined Klaus Jager, a ruthless Gestapo captain played convincingly by Sebastian Roché, will stop at nothing – including torture and summary executions – to locate and eradicate the elusive radio once and for all.

The stage is therefore perfectly set for a tense pursuit through the back alleys and boarded-up buildings of the city. But the trouble with a cat-and-mouse game is that it requires a mouse (or in this case, mice),

and when Andre, a sympathetic businessman whom Juliet stumbles upon when running from a German officer, agrees to ship Jacques and co to his Cote d'Azur mansion he instantly removes Jager's prey to relative safety. By this point it's February 1944, and Jacques and his crew have somehow continued to evade Jager and his assistants (among them a reluctant French officer) despite them triangulating their approximate location as far back as 1942.

Placing the resisters within such opulent confines and dressing them in the finest garments only serves to further dissolve any sense of jeopardy. Couple this with the fact that the Gestapo look as though they'd be unable to catch a sloth, even with a head-start, and it all begins to feel like a dark *Carry On* film, the early attempts to inject a semblance of danger now distant memories. Even the revelation of Andre's true occupation falls flat, and aside from Jager most of the occupiers seem almost benign.

But then comes an unexpected gathering and a final opportunity to ratchet up the tension as Jacques and the other rebels find themselves serving the very men who would execute them if they let their identities slip. Yet instead of the scene providing a real test of their resolve it descends into a crash course in Nazi ideology, one that is utterly out of place given that most of the attendees are Nazis, while their hosts (they naturally assume) are willing collaborators hardly in need of reminding what the Reich stands for.

Even the denouement – a Tarantino-esque flurry of bloodshed aside – is relatively bland. Jacques' broadcasts are belatedly given some meaning when he hurries to warn a nearby town of an approaching Nazi death squad, an opportunity he is afforded by the selflessness of Andre. As a result the poignancy of the film's last moments feel superficial. The film also goes by the title *Burning at Both Ends* — perhaps by this point in the process the writers had been burning their candles at both ends too. **CG**

# SS FOREIGN DIVISIONS & VOLUNTEERS OF LITHUANIA, LATVIA & ESTONIA, 1941-1945

## EXAMINING THE LITTLE-KNOWN CONTRIBUTION OF THE THREE BALTIC STATES TO THE NAZI WAR MACHINE, ILLUSTRATED WITH RARE AND PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPHS

**Author:** Ian Baxter **Publisher:** Pen & Sword Books **Price:** £14.99 **On sale:** Out now

Sandwiched between the totalitarian giants of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the three tiny Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were doomed to suffer at the hands of both during the Second World War, first being occupied by the Red Army in 1940 before being 'liberated' by the advancing Wehrmacht in 1941.

That 'liberation' was a sham, with the Nazis determined to wipe out the region's Jews and use the local populations for their own ends. With his usual attention to detail Ian Baxter documents the formation of the first ad hoc paramilitary units in the area; most of these units were utilised to fight Red Army stragglers and Partisans as well as assist the Nazis in the mass shooting of Jewish men, women and children. Baxter takes the reader through the evolution of these first units as they become regularised into so-called Schützen (Protection) battalions and numbered police regiments.

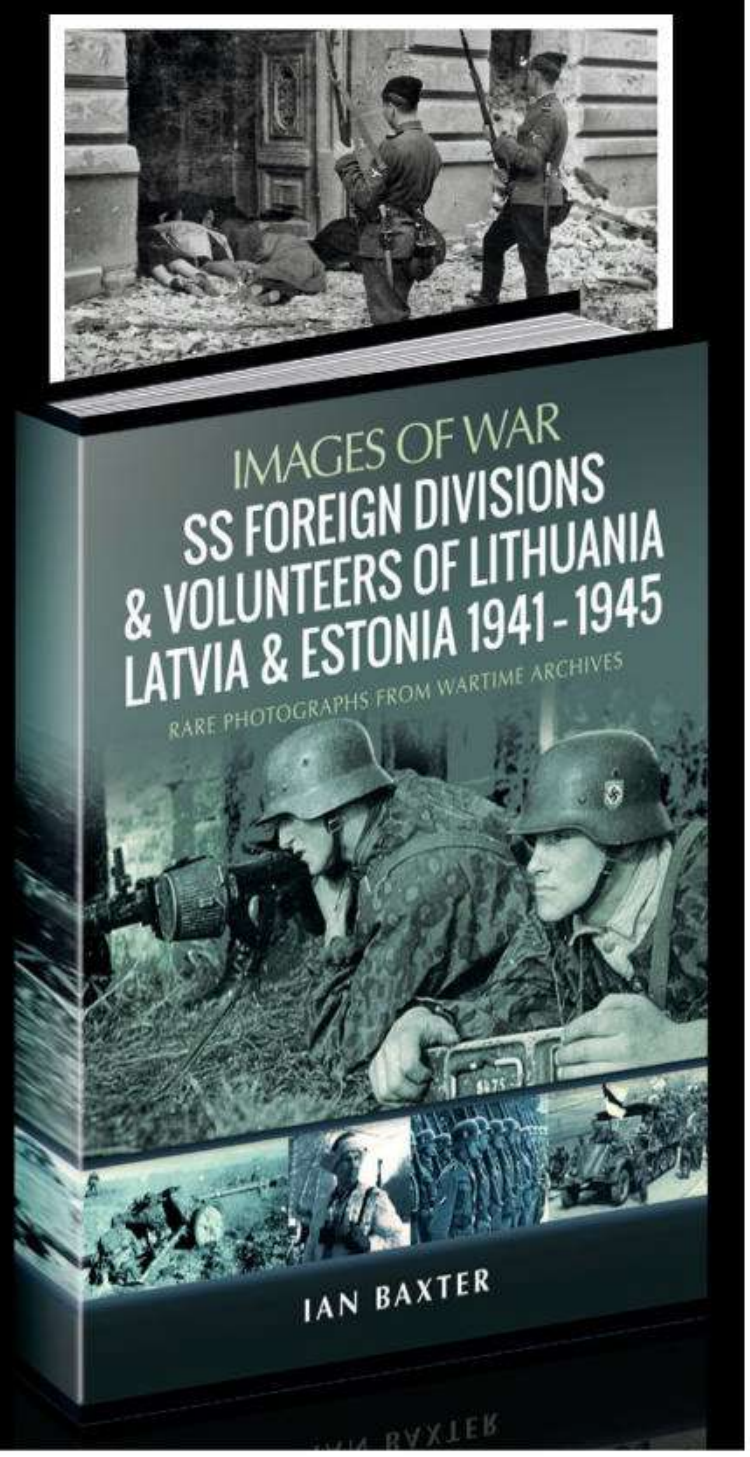
The reader is then taken through the dramatic shift beginning in 1942 when the purpose of these various units abruptly switched from home defence and mass murder to frontline fighting under the flag of Heinrich Himmler's Waffen-SS. Spurred on by the horrific casualties the Wehrmacht was suffering in its deadly arm wrestle with the Red Army – and the internal politics of the Third Reich – increasing numbers of Estonians and Latvians found themselves in Waffen-SS units destined for the front. Training was often poor and equipment never plentiful and Baxter paints a picture of the Balts being treated as little more than cannon fodder, especially when he describes the move from volunteer recruitment to conscription.

As ever with Waffen-SS structures, the almost never-ending changes in unit titles is both confusing and frustrating, and Baxter does well to cover this aspect of the various formations without becoming bogged down. The author also highlights that while the other two nationalities manned three Waffen-SS divisions before the end of the war (two composed of Latvians and one Estonian), the Lithuanians were never accorded that distinction. They were instead organised into Army formations – a situation arising from Himmler's crackpot delusions as to the racial ancestry of the Lithuanians.

The most engrossing section of Baxter's book recounts the combat history of the Baltic formations in the latter half of the Wehrmacht's Eastern campaign, particularly the period 1944-45 when the Red Army was winning. Baxter recounts how the Balts fought in the so-called 'Battle of the European SS' at Narva in Estonia, and in the subsequent retreat into eastern Germany. They suffered dreadful losses until they were effectively destroyed as cohesive fighting units, although a few Latvians ended up helping in the doomed defence Berlin while most headed west to surrender to the advancing Americans.

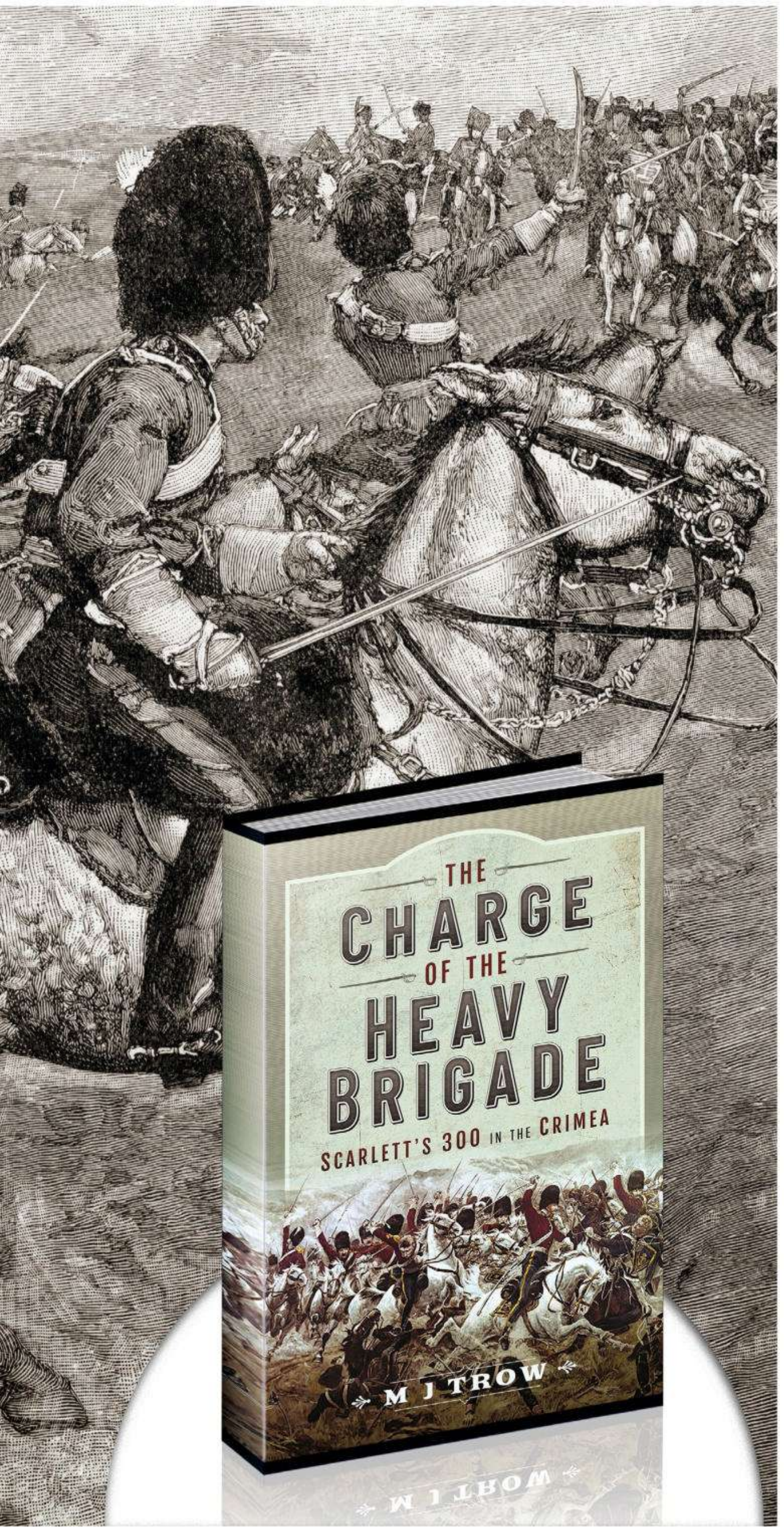
As ever, though, with the *Images Of War* series the stars of the show are the photographs. Baxter has managed to source dozens of illuminating ones, many of which are rare or previously unpublished, and it is those images that are really the centrepiece of the book. **JT**

*Two foreign SS soldiers pictured next to Jews killed in the Warsaw Ghetto*




*Images © Alamy*

*The Heavy Brigade's assault on the enemy has long been overshadowed by the disastrous charge of the Light Brigade*




# THE CHARGE OF THE HEAVY BRIGADE

## A BOOK THAT SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON THE HEROIC DEEDS OF THE HEAVY BRIGADE DURING THE CRIMEAN WAR

**Author:** MJ Trow **Publisher:** Pen & Sword Books
**Price:** £25 **On sale:** Out now

The Battle of Balaklava is probably the most well-known clash of arms of the Crimean War. The disastrous charge of the Light Brigade, which took place during the battle, is also probably the most infamous event of that distant conflict. In the years since the action the Light Brigade's charge has been the subject of numerous books, poems and films. The fact it is viewed as a disaster is why it remains much talked about among those interested in Victorian military history and why it has appealed to filmmakers. Yet there were two other – less well-remembered but far more successful – events that also occurred during the battle. The first was the stand of the 93rd (Sutherland Highlanders), who became immortalised as William Russell's "The Thin Red Line". The second was the Charge of the Heavy Brigade. Of all three, it is the latter that has almost become forgotten to history. Author MJ Trow, however, aims to address this in his new book.

Trow studied military history at King's College, London, and has long held an interest in the history of the British cavalry. His previous works include a biography of William Morris, who led the 17th Lancers during the Charge of the Light Brigade. As such, he is well placed to write this new history of the Heavy Brigade. *The Charge of the Heavy Brigade: Scarlett's 300 in the Crimea* is more than just an account of the Heavy Brigade's role in the Battle of Balaklava. It examines the full history of the Brigade during the war, including its embarkation for Crimea, its experience on campaign on the peninsula, its role in the battle and what happened afterwards. Also included are the women who accompanied their husbands in the brigade to Crimea and who played such important support roles, women who are all too often absent from previous histories.

Within the text we are introduced to a number of key figures. Included in these is General James Scarlett, who commanded the Heavy Brigade in Crimea and who personally led the charge. Enlisted men include the likes of Private William Hancox of the 4th Dragoon Guards, a former farm labourer from Warwickshire who survived the war and would eventually become a troop sergeant major. Another mentioned is a Mrs Rogers, who accompanied her husband on the campaign and, like so many other army wives, undertook the hard, tedious yet essential work of washing and cooking for the men. The author also usefully includes an appendix which lists those serving in the brigade on 25 October 1854, the day of the battle, within which he has highlighted those who were killed or wounded.

The author has produced a well-researched and well-written history of the Heavy Brigade's participation in the Crimean War. It is a welcome addition to the existing literature on the conflict which, most importantly, helps fill a gap in our understanding of the Heavy Brigade's role, which has had such sparse treatment in past histories. This book should appeal to both those with an interest in Victorian military history and the general reader alike. **MS**

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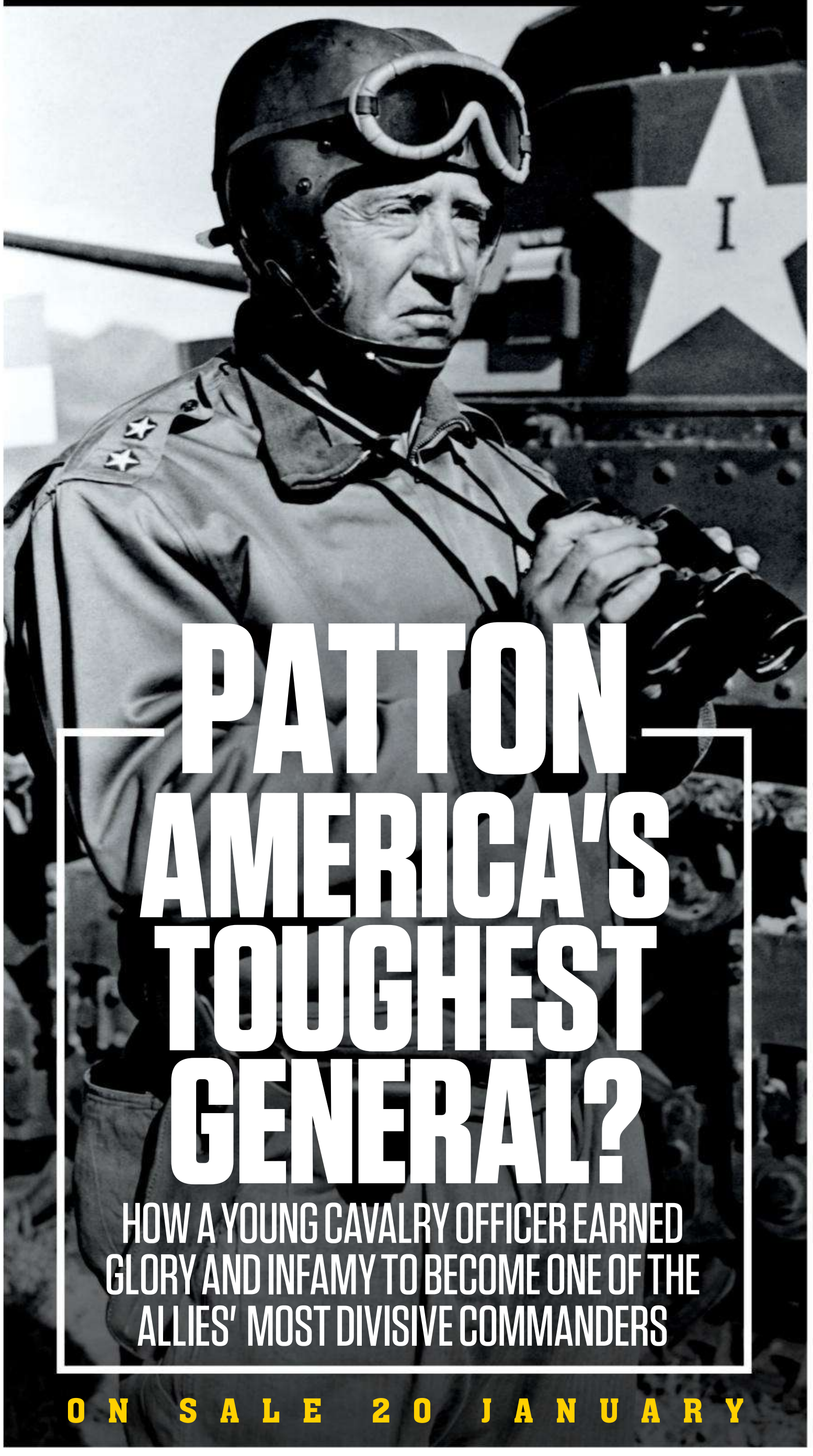

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timothy.williamson@futurenet.com
Senior Designer **Curtis Fermor-Dunman**
Features Editor **Tom Garner**
Production Editor **Iain Noble**
Senior Art Editor **Duncan Crook**

**Contributors**

Alex Bowers, Murray Dahm, Charles Ginger, Chris Gravett, Stephen Keoghane, Craig Moore, Scott Reeves, Mark Simner, Marek Sobieralski, Jules Stewart, Jon Trigg, William E Welsh

**Photography**

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**Advertising**

Media packs are available on request
UK Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
**clare.dove@futurenet.com**
Senior Advertising Manager **Matthew Johnston**
**matthew.johnston@futurenet.com**
07801 930735
Account Manager **Garry Brookes**
**garry.brookes@futurenet.com** +44 020 3970 4176

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# HENRY II'S ARMOUR

## This suit of parade armour belonged to a 16th century king of France who waged war against the Holy Roman Empire

Henry II (1519-59) was king of France between 1547-59. A monarch of the Valois-Angoulême dynasty, his short reign was marked by military hostilities. Henry declared war against Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in a conflict that became known as the Italian War of 1551-59. Ambitious for French domination in Italy, Henry also led offensives in Lorraine where his armies captured the cities of Metz, Toul and Verdun. Calais was recaptured from the English but his reign also saw French defeats in Tuscany and Flanders.

© Getty

*Henry II was married to Catherine de' Medici but his royal mistress was the famously beautiful Diane de Poitiers (above)*

© Alamy

As a proud martial king, Henry was fond of military parades, which is reflected in this elaborate suit of armour that belonged to him. Dated to 1555, it is an exceptional example of 16th century French armour and it still retains much of its original colouring. The suit had at least three distinguished Parisian designers and they covered it with decorative motifs.

The suit's surfaces of gold and silver are covered with dense, Italian-inspired foliate scrolls of human figures and mythical creatures. Decorations include a Roman warrior receiving tribute from two kneeling women, and the god Apollo twice appears chasing the nymph Daphne and with the slain serpent Python. One of Henry's personal badges, the crescent moon, also appears in several places.

Henry's penchant for martial pageantry was ultimately the death of him. In June 1559, he was mortally wounded during a joust when a fragment of splintered lance from his opponent pierced his eye. The king died ten days later.

*Three names of Henry's potential armour designers are known: Jean Cousin the Elder, Étienne Delaune and Baptiste Pellerin*

**"HENRY'S PENCHANT FOR MARTIAL PAGEANTRY WAS ULTIMATELY THE DEATH OF HIM"**

THE MET

Henry II's armour is part of the collections of the Department of Arms and Armor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. For more information visit:

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*Image: Metropolitan Museum of Art*

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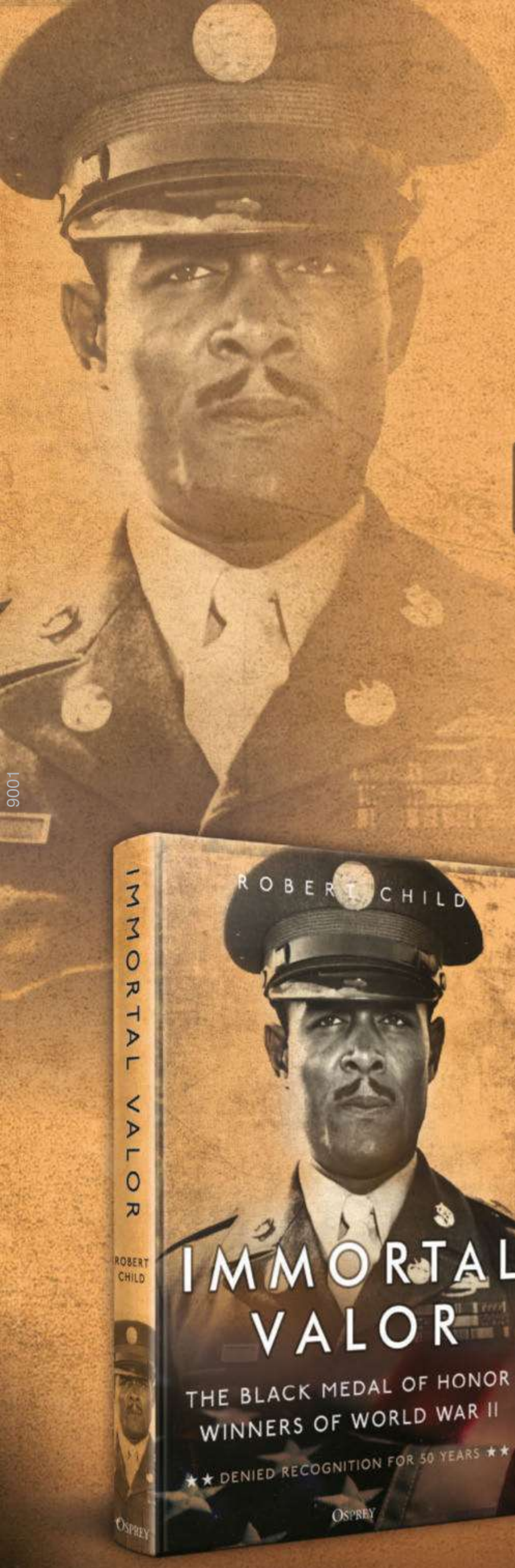

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